HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S RELIGION:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Past assessments of Kleist's religious orientation have been for the most part seriously inadequate. This inadequacy is due to a variety of factors, prominent among which are a) a failure on the part of some critics, particularly those motivated by a polemical religious concern, to approach their task with the necessary scholarly objectivity, and b) an unwillingness on the part of others to give the subject thorough treatment.

This study attempts, on the one hand, to demonstrate the central significance of Kleist's religious concern in his life and thought. It also explores the influence of his broader cultural milieu on his religious orientation. And finally, and most importantly, it seeks to give clearer focus to the basic outlines of Kleist's religion, as it finds expression in his letters and creative works. In an effort to avoid inaccurate and undocumented generalization, specific elements in this poet's religious belief are defined over against the concepts and dogmas common to traditional, orthodox Christian thought, for centuries the prevailing religious force in western culture.

It becomes clear in the course of this study that although there is ample warrant for terming Kleist's central concern essentially religious in nature, ultimately neither the questions he asks nor the answers at which he arrives reveal basic affinity with traditional Christian faith or thought. The religious problems with which the mature poet wrestles are defined quite outside of the framework of such basic Christian realities as sin and grace.

Kleist's earlier divergence from traditional Christianity is to a great extent conditioned by late eighteenth-century Enlightenment religious currents. That this is the case should be in no way surprising, for Aufklärung influences were all-pervasive in the religious and more broadly cultural milieu into which Kleist was born and in which he was reared. To acknowledge the significance of these influences in his thought and experience, however, is not automatically to label young Kleist a rationalistic Aufklärer, for to do so would involve the failure to appreciate adequately his clearly articulated emotional needs and the existential earnestness of his religious quest.

The Kantkrise which Kleist experiences early in 1801 eventually brings about a decisive religious reorientation. As a result of his encounter with the "neuere sogenannte Kantische Philosophie" he sees his previous religious goals shattered and the former avenues to ultimate truth cut off. Confronted with a puzzling and silently enigmatic God, and an equally puzzling

and threatening world, he seeks existential certainty from a new, totally non-rational source. It is the testimony of his dramas and Novellen in particular that only an appeal to the divine interior principle, the Ich, can give meaningful direction, can furnish the religious certainty without which he cannot go on. This is the gospel as articulated in Kleist's works, the "Evangelium des Gefühls."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this dissertation on Kleist's religion is introductory in nature and consists largely of a review and analysis of the work done in this area prior to the present time. The studies reviewed in these pages are grouped largely on the basis of the critical and sometimes specifically religious orientation of their authors. Both August Sauer and Friedrich Braig, whose works are treated first, write from an obvious Catholic point of view and see in Kleist's life and works a movement toward Christianity in its traditional Roman Catholic form. Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, whose essay is analyzed next, does not write from a specifically theological perspective. She emphasizes the influence of Enlightenment thought on Kleist's religious development and stresses the central role of the fear of chance or fate in Kleist's religious outlook. The studies of both Gerhard Fricke and Ernst Beutler, on the other hand, reveal a critical orientation heavily influenced by existentialist thought. These two critics see in Kleist's works a concentration on man's existential plight, and define the problems Kleist saw and depicted in those terms. The final pages of this chapter contain brief comment on the tendency of recent critics to devote a minimum of space to a study of Kleist's religious development and the nature of his mature religious views.

August Sauer, writing in 1907, states that "eine Untersuchung über Kleists Verhältnis zur Religion ist mir nicht bekannt."[1] Kleists Todeslitanei, the study in which Sauer makes the above comment, is a limited attempt in this direction. In this short work he focuses attention on two letters exchanged by Kleist and Henriette Vogel shortly before their suicide,[2] although in an attempt to buttress his case he also appeals briefly to certain of Kleist's earlier letters and creative works.

Sauer begins by examining the letter written by Kleist to Henriette, and finds that it exhibits both the form and tone of the Catholic litany, the "bitt' für uns" of the litany being replaced by the ejaculations "o Liebste, wie nenn' ich Dich" and "wie lieb ich Dich." He also notes that many of the expressions found in Kleist's letter are also commonly found in Catholic "Marienliteratur," and by way of illustration provides a chart of such usage.

However, Kleist was influenced by Catholicism and manifested a positive interest in it long before 1811, according to Sauer. In an effort to provide evidence for this earlier interest in Catholicism, Sauer points to the "Legendenton" which marks Die

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[1]August Sauer, Kleists Todeslitanei ("Prager deutsche Studien"; Prag: Druck und Verlag von Carl Bellmann, 1907), siebentes Heft, p. 19. Throughout the remainder of this analysis of Sauer's study, page references to the work itself will be made in parentheses.

[2]For the text of Kleist's letter to Henriette Vogel see Heinrich von Kleist, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Helmut Sembdner (2 vols., 2. Auflage; München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1961), I, p. 36. Henriette's letter to Kleist is found in the same volume, p. 917. All references in this dissertation to Kleist's letters, dramas, Novellen and essays will cite this edition, henceforth designated Werke.

heilige Cäcilie, written 1810, and suggests that Kleist's drama Amphitryon, written fully five years prior to his death, contains ironic reflections of the dogma of the immaculate conception. But even Amphitryon does not contain the earliest indications of Catholic influence on Kleist, in Sauer's opinion. He admits that when Kleist was in Würzburg in 1800 he reacted negatively to Catholicism, but asserts at the same time that the descriptions of nature which Kleist penned shortly after his Würzburg experience contain expressions borrowed from the Catholic worship services, thereby intimating that the Catholic service had made some real impression on Kleist. He also calls attention to Kleist's later appreciation of Raphael's "Madonna" as well as his positive reaction to the Catholic "Gottesdienst" in Dresden in 1801. And now, according to Sauer, as his life nears its end, "hatte er wieder eine Genossin gefunden, die seine Seele zu der katholischen Religion hinzieht, ja ihn in mystische Nebel einhüllt" (p. 20). This brief quotation may be taken as the central thesis of Sauer's study.

Although never a Catholic herself, Henriette qualifies for the role of mediatress by virtue of her association with Catholics prominent in literary circles, who presumably introduced her to seventeenth-century Catholic mysticism. It is this mysticism, says Sauer, which is "die eigentliche Quelle, aus der Henriette sich berauschte, aus der die besondere katholische Färbung der Diktion in unseren Schriftstücken sich erklärt" (p. 24). Sauer goes into some detail showing Henriette's use of terms found in the writings of Spee and Silesius. He claims to detect further indications of her general religious concern in her appreciation of biblical Psalms and

the Song of Solomon, as well as in her interest in "geistliche Lieder."

Concluding his argument, Sauer claims that "in das Bild von Kleists letzter Lebenszeit fügt sich . . . als ein neuer Zug die entschiedene Hinneigung zur katholischen Mystik ein" (p. 30). In the Abendblätter, a daily newspaper which Kleist edited in late 1810 and early 1811, Sauer notes a greater appreciation of the personality of Christ. And certainly, according to Sauer, the two letters under consideration give evidence of "mystische Raserei," in regard to both form and content. With death immanent, "eine tiefe Frömmigkeit" has taken hold of Kleist. The echoes of biblical language found in his last letter give fitting expression to his religious state, says Sauer; and Kleist's soul, which has become transfigured and "zum Tode reif" through its associations with Henriette and presumably her Catholic mysticism, joyfully exchanges this world for the better one.

Certain elements in Sauer's argument are plausible enough. Both of the letters under consideration do echo religious and specifically biblical language. It is well possible that Kleist consciously or unconsciously cast his letter in the form of the Catholic litany, since this is a formal device used previously by some of his contemporaries, as Sauer himself mentions. And Henriette's letter does contain many terms and expressions characteristic of 17th century mystical writings.

It is also true that Kleist stated in 1801 that "nur einen Tropfen Vergessenheit, und mit Wollust würde ich katholisch werden,"[3]

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[3] Werke, II, 651.

and that he was at that time deeply impressed by Raphael's "Madonna." Furthermore, Kleist did believe in personal immortality, and in a letter written just before his death he does depict himself as walking about heaven "mit langen Flügeln." It is undeniable, as Sauer states, that both Kleist and Henriette enjoyed extensive associations with Catholic Romanticists. And Henriette (and apparently also Kleist) were fond of "geistliche Lieder."

However, Sauer's case is not carefully and convincingly constructed, and the conclusions he draws appear to be at best dubious in value. In the first place, in an effort to prove his case Sauer extracts isolated events from Kleist's life, and does not examine them in context. He pays grossly insufficient attention to Kleist's earlier years in particular, and does not examine his religious development in its broader setting. Kleist's "nur einen Tropfen Vergessenheit, und mit Wollust würde ich katholisch werden," for example, cannot be adequately evaluated without reference to the texture of his previous religious and intellectual attitudes.

It is also obvious that Sauer's appeals to Kleist's works for substantiating evidence are quite unconvincing by virtue of their curtness and lack of both depth and breadth. He vaguely notes the "katholisierende Tendenz" in Die heilige Cäcilie without clarifying his terms or providing evidence of such a tendency from the work itself. He totally ignores Kleist's other Novellen, some of which (notably Das Erdbeben in Chili and Der Findling) show aspects of the Catholic Church in a less favorable light. Nor does he devote serious attention to any of Kleist's dramas.

It is true, as Sauer states, that in his final days Kleist professed belief in personal immortality, but this can scarcely be considered to be proof for inclinations toward Catholicism. Even in his more youthful years which Sauer himself certainly would admit to be quite un-Catholic in tone, Kleist held such a belief. And one wonders what there is in Kleist's short, vague description of heaven which shows distinctively Catholic traits.[4]

Sauer further reminds us that Henriette enjoyed "geistliche Lieder," and another witness[5] informs us that Kleist shared her interest in them. But contemporary use of negro spirituals, for example, indicates that interest in "religious songs" need not indicate deep religious concern on the part of those who sing or enjoy them. Kleist's interest in "geistliche Lieder" may well indicate a predominantly musical appreciation, which he certainly had, or a response which is purely poetic or merely emotional. Kleist's esthetic sensibilities may also lie at the root of his use of the "tone and form" of the Catholic litany which Sauer claims to see in his letter to Henriette.

It seems peculiar that Sauer makes the non-Catholic Henriette Vogel the agent drawing Kleist toward Catholicism, when Kleist's close friend of long standing, Adam Müller, was a staunch Catholic. Why could not Müller serve as agent for Kleist's "conversion?"

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[4]"Wir, unsererseits, wollen nichts von den Freuden dieser Welt wissen und träumen lauter himmlische Fluren und Sonnen, in deren Schimmer wir, mit langen Flügeln an den Schultern, umherwandeln werden" (Werke, II, 886).

[5]See Heinrich von Kleists Lebensspuren, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1957), 353.

And why, incidentally, does Müller fail to testify to a tendency toward Catholicism in Kleist?[6] It does seem that Sauer might at least have touched upon these questions. It is also curious that Kleist, presumably drawn toward a specifically Catholic piety, makes no specific mention in his latter days of the Virgin Mary, certainly a unique Catholic object of adoration.

It would seem, then, that Sauer's argument is generally unsatisfactory. In the first place, he deals with specific creative works and events in Kleist's life out of context, and makes singular assertions on the basis of the scantiest of evidence. He over-emphasizes that evidence which to his mind appears to substantiate his argument, and ignores material which appears to contradict his thesis. His study lacks depth and scope, and does not reveal an adequate understanding of the total complex of Kleist's life and thought. In Sauer's defense it might be protested that any essay of restricted length does not allow for such thorough treatment of the subject. In that case, a thesis of such a unique and startling nature might best be left unstated. Sauer's attempt to catholicize Kleist leaves many questions unanswered, lacks respect for the facts, and is neither a thorough nor convincing study.

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[6]Adam Müller, who was in many ways Kleist's closest and most loyal friend, made the following comment about Kleist and Henriette Vogel: "Dann aber ist es ihnen auch erlaubt zu sagen, dass das Leben beider übrigens so rein und fleckenlos war, als es ohne den höheren Glauben, den sie durch ihr Ende verleugneten, überhaupt sein konnte. . ." (Lebensspuren, 422). And Friedrich Schlegel wrote that Kleist's death suggests "auf welche Verirrungen und Abwege der Mensch durch Vergessenheit und Hintansetzung alles höheren Glaubens geraten könne" (Lebensspuren, 420).

August Sauer was not the only critic to attempt an analysis of Kleist's life and works from a religious and specifically Roman Catholic perspective. In 1925 Friedrich Braig's detailed and lengthy study of Kleist was published.[7] In the preface to his work Braig candidly states: "Aus der Einheit des metaphysischen und religiösen Grundes sind die Werke selbst neu aufgefasst und gedeutet."[8] Nowhere in this study does Braig attempt to conceal his own personal religious convictions, which are clearly Catholic, and which are the sole point of origin of his interpretation of Kleist's life and art. Rather, he insists time and again that it is only from the vantage point afforded by religion, and specifically the Catholic religion, that one can attain an adequate and clear picture of Kleist's inner struggles and development.

Although one may well find his emphasis and conclusions to be grossly unsatisfactory, Braig cannot be accused of proceeding in the sketchy manner which characterizes Sauer's effort. Instead of touching briefly upon only a few prominent points in Kleist's life, as Sauer does, he traces with some care all of the aspects of Kleist's religious quest, as he sees it. He also attempts to set the total milieu in which Kleist's activity took place, rather than extracting isolated fragments from his life and dealing with them out of context. Thus he attempts to assess Kleist's involvement in rationalistic religion, the sentimental religion of "Gefühlsseligkeit," quietistic

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[7]Friedrich Braig, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925).

[8]Braig, "Vorwort," p. VIII. Throughout the remainder of this analysis of Braig's study, page references to the work itself will be made in parentheses.

mysticism, and Rousseauan romanticism. He emphasizes the religious significance of Kleist's so-called "Kantkrise" as well as that of his experience in the Dresden cathedral in 1801. In short, Braig's investigation of his subject is considerably more thorough and systematic than that of his predecessor, Sauer.

Given his critical point of departure, Braig's choice of basic themes for the first segment of his work is not at all surprising. For example, he lays heavy stress on the central role of guilt and guilt-feelings in Kleist's life. "Einen festgegründeten Gottesglauben hat er sich nie errungen, gerade das Schuldbewusstsein hinderte ihn . . ." (p. 33) states Braig. And immediately prior to his trip to France in 1801 Kleist longs for death, for, we are told, "das Wissen um die eigene Schuld, die ihn der Kraft zum Höchsten beraubt hatte, drohte ihn vollends zu vernichten" (p. 80). Braig also emphasizes Kleist's intense loneliness, his feeling of alienation from both God and man, which he terms "metaphysisch begründet," and which, consequently, can be overcome only by religious faith. And as one would expect, the central significance of Kleist's religious quest, his longing for "eine in absoluter Wahrheit ruhende Religion" (p.77) is given prominent emphasis. Kleist's study of Kant is motivated by a desire for clarification of the concept "religion"; in fact, his entire life can be seen, according to Braig, as an intense search for God. "Tasso wie Kleist, von unendlicher Sehnsucht durch die Welt gejagt, suchten die Sonne des Lebens. Aus der Bahn geworfen, rasten sie der Zentralsonne zu, die nicht da, nicht dort im Weltall glühte, die sie in ihrem eigenen kranken Herzen nicht finden konnten: Gott" (p. 94).

After exploring Kleist's earlier years and stating his own critical and religious perspective, Braig proceeds to a relatively lengthy interpretation of each of Kleist's dramas. It is impossible and perhaps unnecessary to give the details of the individual interpretations. Short résumés of a few of Braig's typical analyses accompanied with some key quotations should serve to give an adequate picture of the tone and thrust of the work.

The opening pages of Braig's discussion of Schroffenstein contain a statement of the religious insight which in his eyes is the basis of all of Kleist's creative effort. Kleist saw with painful clarity, says Braig, the basis of all tragedy, namely "die Urstände der Menschheit mit ihren Folgen" (p. 104). This religious motif allegedly comes to expression in one way or another in all of his dramas. This, he asserts, is clearly the case in Schroffenstein, in which the universal curse of sin rests upon the warring families. In his depiction of the struggle between the forces of love and hatred Kleist reveals, in Braig's words, "das Rätsel der Welt, die Frage von Sünde und Erlösung" (p. 110). "Der stumme Schrei nach Erlösung in allen ist der eigentliche Träger der tragischen Stimmung" (p. 118), and the victory of hatred in this play testifies to the pessimism which gripped the budding poet himself. In this first play and all those that follow it, says Braig, Kleist sees himself confronted by the questions of Christian metaphysics and the Christian faith.

Even in Kleist's first comedy, Der zerbrochene Krug, Braig sees a similar preoccupation with man's sinful being. The metaphysical significance of this play supposedly centers in the insight that "das Gesetz, der Wille Gottes, siegt hier über die Willkür des

Menschen und dessen, der ihn dabei treibt, des Teufels" (p. 173). In Schroffenstein Kleist showed an acute awareness of sin; in Der zerbrochene Krug, and especially in the figure of Eve, we are told, the second basic religious reality appears--that of redemption. Thus Eve's story is of intimate concern to the poet himself.

> Die Geschichte Evchens ist ein Stück von der Geschichte der Seele des Dichters. Wie sie hat auch er ein Geheimnis zu bewahren in der Brust. Auch er sieht sich in das Schein- und Trugspiel der Welt verwickelt wie sie. Nicht ganz so rein ist es in seinem Leben abgegangen, er hat sich vor wirklicher Schuld nicht zu bewahren vermocht, ein Adamskind wie alle. Aber aus der glühenden Sehnsucht nach der Reinheit und Unschuld des Herzens wollte er sich emporringen zum Kinde auch dieser zweiten Eva, der Mutter des Erlösers, deren Bild schon aus dem Innern Evchens strahlt und glänzt wie ein wunderbarer Stern in einer fremden Welt (p. 193).

Kleist's next drama, Amphitryon, allegedly treats the same religious problems of sin and redemption. However, a new focus can also be detected in this play, for it deals with the secret of Christ's incarnation. "Nicht das Liebesabenteuer des verweltlichten und vermenschlichten Gottes stand für Kleist im Vordergrunde, sondern er suchte nun umgekehrt den Weg von der Vermenschlichung des Gottes wieder zum Geheimnis der Menschwerdung Gottes, d. h. also zum Mysterium des Mensch gewordenen Gottessohnes zurückzugehen" (p. 198). It is specifically this aspect of Christianity with which Kleist supposedly is here concerned, and "der antike Mythus wurde für Kleist den Leib, durch den hindurch nun das Mysterium von der Menschwerdung des Erlösers sichtbar wurde" (p. 199). In Braig's eyes Alkmene is an unsullied creature of paradise, "frei vom Sündenfall des selbstherrlichen Verstandes" (p. 206). Jupiter, we are told, is a kind of double-God, who appears first as a rationalistic God and later as the Christian Lord of Creation. Man's sin

has thrust the true God infinitely far away; Alkmene-Mary's humility has drawn him back to earth again and the mystery of the incarnation can now be fulfilled. Alkmene lives in the infinite will of God, whose image on earth has once again been restored through her.

With the writing of Amphitryon Kleist himself has stepped to the very threshhold of Christian faith, Braig claims. In Penthesilea, his next play, there takes place "die tragische Wandlung . . . vom Heidentum zum Christentum, vom Mythus zur Historie, von der Willkür zum Gesetze, aus Irrtum, Wahn und Schein zur ewigen Wahrheit des Lebens" (p. 219). Behind the history of the Amazon state Braig sees the history of man's fall from sinlessness, with all its consequences. The Amazons once were innocent and free, but lost both of these qualities as a result of human violence and caprice. The divine order of the world was disrupted, and in the wake of this initial catastrophe one evil followed hard upon the other. Society became distorted, false worship and false knowledge of God arose. "Und so sah nun Kleist das grosse tragische Problem in der Wiedergewinnung der verlorenen metaphysischen Freiheit der Frauen, der Menschheit in ihnen. Das ist ausschliesslich seine geniale Tat" (p. 221).

In this environment Penthesilea is born, pure and noble, sinless and free, as man was when the hands of God first gave him shape. In this world of sin and delusion it falls upon her to break through the evil and perverted law of the Amazons, to fulfill it, to restore divine order and truth, and thus to "save" her people. The way she must go is the way of death. "Penthesilea stirbt den Liebes-, Sühne- und Erlösungstod" (p. 239). Through her sacrificial death Penthesilea, obviously symbolic of Christ, lifts the curse.

"Die Tragödie des Genius in einer fremden Welt, beladen mit der Bürde einer übergewaltigen Sendung, mit der er sich vom Gott geschlagen weiss, hat Kleist zur symbolischen Tragödie von der Erlösung der Menschheit vertieft" (p. 254).

Braig claims to discover the same basic Christian themes in all of Kleist's dramas and Novellen. "Zwischen den beiden Zentralgedanken des Christentums, von der Erbsünde und von der Erlösung, ist notwendig auch der Ideengang der Novellenreihe wie der Dramenreihe ausgespannt" (p. 432). Hence it is unnecessary to spend additional time summarizing individual interpretations. It might be said, however, that Braig finds in Käthchen evidence that Kleist has taken another decisive step toward the Christian faith. "Alle den Dichter selbst von der Welt des christlichen Glaubens noch trennenden Schranken sind hier gefallen, und üppig wuchert empor der Zauber und die Schönheit einer Traummärchenwelt, wo das unendliche Glück und der Friede des einst verlorenen Paradieses blühen" (p. 290). He becomes quite eloquent in describing the mood of the poet as he sees it revealed in the play.

> Nun ist der Fluch genommen von der Schöpfung, und sie beginnt zu kreisen und zu tönen in himmlischen Klängen. Die Quellen des Lebens springen wieder und vereinigen sich zum leuchtenden Strome. Die Sprache des Lebens ist wieder gefunden, die alle Wesen vereint in seliger Liebe. Käthchen führt sie, das Kind des himmlischen Vaters. Verzückt kniet der Dichter vor der hehren Gestalt, ihr hatte all sein Sehnen und Ringen gegolten, das Werk seines Lebens. Käthchen hat ihm die Zunge gelöst um die Sprache Gottes zu führen, die Sprache des Paradieses, die der Dichter zu künden hat als Seher, Priester und Prophet am Altare des Lebens. Käthchen ist des Dichters eigene singende Seele . . ." (p. 310).

Among the more curious observations made by Braig in the remainder of his study is the comment that Homburg's ultimate decision,

after his initial sentencing, is either "ein Christ zu sein oder ewig unterzugehen" (p. 425). Braig's book abounds with such observations, some of which border on the bizarre. He also suggests, perhaps somewhat more reasonably, that in the series of dramas leading from Schroffenstein to Käthchen one can detect a progression from fate tragedy to drama in which Christian Providence dominates. Nevertheless, says Braig, Kleist "entsagte dem irdischen Leben, bevor er das Letzte und Höchste erfüllte. Das Kreuz auf Golgotha hat ihn nicht zu bewegen vermocht die Tragödie seines Lebens bis zum Letzten durchzuleiden" (p. 430).

It is difficult to know where to begin in criticizing Braig's approach and conclusions. To say merely that this study lacks objectivity is not particularly helpful or revealing, for a relative lack of objectivity seems to characterize a great deal of Kleist criticism.[9] Nor is it necessarily damning to say that Braig thinks and writes from a Christian and specifically Roman Catholic point of view. However, there is a great deal of difference between, on the one hand, analyzing and evaluating from a Catholic perspective, and on the other, superimposing a specific theological structure on specific Novellen and dramas or on the totality of Kleist's creative works. It is precisely this latter procedure which Braig follows throughout his book on Kleist. He approaches Kleist's works with pre-conceived ideas, bent upon finding theological content in them. This is the basic shortcoming of Braig's entire effort.

This explains the novel exegesis and commentary to which the

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[9]Heinrich von Kleist, written by the respected Friedrich Gundolf, can be cited as one striking example of this tendency.

reader is subjected time and again. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point. As has been noted above, Amphitryon deals with the secret of the divine incarnation and Penthesilea depicts the tragic transformation from heathendom to Christianity, the woman Penthesilea becoming a kind of Christ-figure, who suffers and dies for the "redemption" of her people. The Novelle Die Verlobung in St. Domingo becomes a kind of allegory, in which "die grosse metaphysische Frage von Blut und Berufung, von Natur und Gnade" (p. 464) is explored. In Kleist's Erdbeben in Chili one sees a naturalistic mirroring of the birth of Christ, and also the baby born to the Marquise von O is a "Nachbild des himmlischen Kindes in der Krippe zu Bethlehem" (p. 456). The common cup of water shared by Agnes and Ottokar in Schroffenstein becomes "das naturalistische Symbol des Geheimnisses des Abendmahles" (p. 122). One final example of Braig's theologizing tendency and fervent imagination is taken from his eloquently imaginative paraphrase of the garden scene in Der Prinz von Homburg:

> Der Garten des Schlosses zu Fehrbellin ist der Paradiesesgarten, wo "Levkoyn und Nelken" lieblich duften, aber Nacht ist es im Paradiese und traumwandelnd nur geht der Mensch in ihm, der junge Prinz von Homburg. Seine Augen sind geöffnet, aber er sieht nicht, sein Ohr ist gespannt, aber er hört nicht. Wie Adam wandelt er beim Sündenfalle, verliebt in sich und ganz nur in seinem Ich befangen. . . .
>
> Da öffnet sich das Tor des Schlosses, eine Lichtflut strömt heraus als ob die seligen Himmelsräume selber erschlossen wären, und wie Gott Vater, der Herr der Welten, erscheinen der grosse Kurfürst "mit der Stirn des Zeus," die Kurfürstin, Natalie, die Geliebte seiner Seele, alle, die Homburgs Herzen teuer sind, als die verklärten seligen Geister. Und sie steigen die Schlosstreppe wie die Himmelsleiter hernieder, wunderbare Wohligkeit, das Vorgefühl der ewigen Glückseligkeit durchströmt den Prinzen, er träumt voraus den Traum des ewigen Lebens . . . "Hoch auf, gleich einem Genius des Ruhms" hebt sie [Natalie] den Kranz, und der Prinz, in unermesslicher Seligkeit flüsternd: "Natalie! Mein Mädchen! Meine Braut!" und "O meine Mutter!" streckt die Hände aus um den Kranz zu empfangen,

> zu der Geliebten Füssen will er sinken--aber wie der Duft über den Tälern vor eines Morgenwindes frischem Hauch zerstiebt, so weicht ihm die selige Schar, die Rampe wieder ersteigend, aus. "Endlos, bis an das Tor des Himmels" dehnt sich die Treppe, vergeblich sucht der Träumer "Der Teuren einen ängstlich zu erhaschen"--das Tor geht wieder auf, Blitze zucken hervor und verschlingen die selige Schar, rasselnd fällt das Tor zusammen--und wieder ist es die milde Sommernacht im Schlossgarten zu Fehrbellin. . . . (p. 386).

In conclusion however, it cannot be denied that, as Rudolf Unger[10] emphasizes, Braig's study does contain valuable material. For the purposes of this dissertation it is particularly relevant to note the attention Braig pays to Kleist's involvement in the various religious currents of his day. To be sure, his analyses are often highly colored, but he doubtlessly does call attention to an area of Kleist's experience which is virtually ignored by many critical biographers. Unger suggests that in specific instances Braig shows fine psychological insight, and that he also contributes interesting suggestions regarding models and sources for Kleist's works. However, the rather isolated helpful elements in this work are woven into a critical complex which, because of the author's basically unacceptable analytical procedure, is generally unsatisfactory. Unger summarizes the entire situation well in the following quotation.

> Bei aller willigen Anerkennung des Mutes, der Energie, des Geistes und der Kenntnis, ja, ich möchte sagen, des heiligen Ernstes, mit dem Braig sein Unternehmen, Kleist gleichsam geschichtsphilosophisch in den Zusammenhang der philosophia perennia einzustellen, durchgeführt hat, scheint mir dieser Versuch, sofern als er wissenschaftlich-objektive Beweisführung gemeint ist, nicht gelungen. Vielmehr kann ich in dem Werk . . . wesentlich nur ein persönliches Bekenntnis des Verfassers sehen:

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[10]Rudolf Unger, "Ein spekulatives Kleistbild auf religiösem Hintergrunde," Die Literatur, XXIX (Oktober-September, 1926-1927), 132.

> als solches individual- und zeit-psychologisch, wie angedeutet, sicherlich ungemein interessant und bedeutsam, . . . zugleich aber auch, . . . gemessen an der nun einmal von aller Wissenschaft unabtrennlichen Forderung untendenziöser . . . Sachlichkeit, tief problematisch, ja bedenklich.[11]

The picture of Kleist's religious development given by Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer[12] differs quite radically from that drawn by Braig. Whereas Braig sees the essence of Kleist's life and works to consist in a sometimes groping progress toward Christianity in its Roman Catholic form, Prigge-Kruhoeffer attempts to demonstrate that the temper of Kleist's life, including its religious aspects, is basically determined by two related impulses, the first of which is centered in Enlightenment-rationalistic thought. This impulse not only gives rise to his "Lebensplan,"[13] but also continues as a subterranean current which in his later life periodically comes to the surface, particularly after periods of great stress. Thus she finds, for example, that although the "Lebensplan" and the Novelle Der Zweikampf are separated by a relatively lengthy time interval, they show basically the same rationalistic framework.

In typical Enlightenment style, says Prigge-Kruhoeffer, Kleist wants to discover the secret of life's mechanism, so that he can control life and calculate the unknown. "Mit wissenschaftlichen

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[11]Unger, 138.

[12]Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, "Heinrich von Kleist, Religiosität und Charakter," Jahrbuch der Kleist-Gesellschaft, III and IV, 1923-1924 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1925), 1. Throughout the remainder of this analysis of Prigge-Kruhoeffer's study, page references to the work itself will be made in parentheses.

[13]Cf. Werke, II, 490.

Kenntnissen will er dem Weltgeschehen seine beunruhigende Unbestimmtheit nehmen, es zu etwas Bestimmten, Geordneten, Geregelten machen. Damit also erstrebt Kleist nichts Anderes, als was die Philosophie seiner Zeit und er mit ihr als selbstverständlich, der menschlichen Vernunft erreichbar voraussetzte" (p. 11). However, for Kleist such a rationally achieved ordering of life is an inner necessity of peculiar urgency, for without it life's occurrences become accidental, a matter of chance, uncontrollable. Thus a second determinative impulse stems from the desperate "Angst vor dem Zufall" which haunts Kleist all of his days, and which explains the direction of his entire life, particularly in its religious dimension. To quote Prigge-Kruhoeffer herself: "Die Schicksalsangst Kleists ist die Triebkraft seiner Lebensäusserungen, das Fundament, auf dem sich auch seine Religiosität aufbaut" (p. 11). Basic in Kleist's religious experience, then, is the tendency so prominent in the Enlightenment, namely to order the world through knowledge. Coupled with this is his own quite unique dread of chaos, a lack of order, seen as the ruling of chance ("Zufall"), which in Kleist's works is generally synonymous with fate ("Schicksal").

The Deity of Kleist's earlier "Lebensplan" days Prigge-Kruhoeffer finds to be an abstract God, the sum of perfections, of eternal truths, a God certainly more accessible to "Verstand" than to "Glauben." Hence the vital importance of "Bildung"; Kleist himself, Prigge-Kruhoeffer reminds us, terms the study of mathematics, philosophy and physics "höhere Theologie" (p. 12). And the fact that the insights, the "Schatz von Wahrheiten" gained in this life are to be taken along as a personal possession to the next life serves to

increase the value of knowledge. Not only does it provide order for this life, but also for the life to come.

Kleist's study of Kant in 1801, his discovery of the subjectivity of all rational knowledge is thus catastrophic, for if "alles Wissen ist Nichtwissen," Kleist's rationalistic God is badly maimed, or at least rendered inaccessible, there is no possibility of knowable order in life, and chaos reigns. After Kant, writes Prigge-Kruhoeffer, "Zufall" is qualitatively inexplicable, and corresponds to a maddening, even a devilish frame of mind, as can be seen in Der Findling and Schroffenstein.

But Kleist, says Prigge-Kruhoeffer, cannot exist in a chaotic world, so he attempts to give form to his life by setting up goals for himself, of which the most notable are the writing of Guiskard and his efforts toward the liberation of Germany. Consciously or unconsciously, he continues to depict a world ultimately comprehensible, in which man, in the Enlightenment tradition, is allotted a recognizable "Aufgabe." Although the earlier unproblematical Deity of Rationalism is no more, Kleist's "Gefühl," according to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, tells him that there is yet a God. However, he can neither reason "Zufall" out of existence nor incorporate it as Providence into his concept of God. The result is that he has two centers of gravity and cannot find lasting equilibrium. Kleist cannot reconcile an omniscient and good God, on the one hand, with "Zufall," which is for him an evil and threatening force, on the other. Total absorption in specific projects, such as the writing of Guiskard, temporarily diverts his attention from this problem, but whenever one of these "Lebensziele" collapses he is thrown anew

into the agonizing "Gott-Zufall" conflict, from which there can be no escape and which eventually can issue only in madness.

In the opinion of Prigge-Kruhoeffer, figures of a higher type, such as Guiskard, Penthesilea and Kohlhaas, illustrate one way of solving this problem and of winning inner independence from the fate constantly threatening man. Guiskard in particular is a man of gigantic proportions, elevated and sublime. Instead of submitting to the divine will or to capricious forces outside himself he affirms his own nature, asserting himself in bold, Promethean fashion. Rather than overcome his impulses, Guiskard, by grandly affirming his own will, draws God down toward himself, so that he himself is elevated into near proximity with God, and his will becomes one with God's will. He possesses a new freedom, he encloses fate within himself, although in this process, Prigge-Kruhoeffer says, he also inevitably incurs a kind of guilt. Penthesilea is another such sublime figure who follows her "Gefühl" because it is a holy necessity and thus attains a divine freedom.

> Penthesilea kann einfach nicht anders. Und das Geheimnis dieses Zwanges, der sich an das Ungeheure wagt, wird in dieser Höhe der Betrachtung geheiligt. Dieser, das Uebermass anstrebende Mensch fühlt Gott in sich. Es ist niemand da, den man anklagen könnte, wenn er sein ungeheures Ziel nicht erreicht; denn es herrscht nur ein einziger Wille (p. 54).

Thus, we are told, Kleist reconciles God and "Zufall" in artistic form and temporarily restrains himself from madness. But he is too realistic to accept such boundless self-affirmation as a way out of his own concrete impasse. After 1803, in Prigge-Kruhoeffer's opinion, the constant conflict between God and "Zufall" gives way to a mood of resignation. For although God and "Zufall" coexist,

"Zufall" ultimately reigns, unhindered by God, and Kleist "sieht . . . milde und resigniert, zusammen mit diesem Gott, auf seine Verzweiflungen zurück, jeden Tag bereit zu sterben" (p. 55). The eternal truths of God remain permanently concealed, but it does not really matter, for life is at best transitory, and death makes evil and "Zufall" of no account.

Hence, according to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, there is in Das Erdbeben in Chili and Der Findling no protest against the triumph of evil. In both Novellen God acts quite unaffected by it; instead of dominating "Zufall" he only weakens it by pointing to the transitory nature of life. "Lebensmüdigkeit" sets in, for the world has lost its significance and life is no longer of real account. "Lebensmüdigkeit" eventually gives way to "Lebensekel," and death becomes life's eternal refrain, for "Zufall" must have its way; there is no point in fighting it. This, says Prigge-Kruhoeffer, is but another aspect of the "allgemeine Not der Welt," its "Gebrechlichkeit," and Kleist knows it only too well.

Kleist's "Gefühl" tells him that somewhere there is eternal truth ultimately giving meaning to human existence, but one cannot know it clearly enough to construct a program on the basis of it, or to explain "Zufall" by an appeal to it. At best man has only a dream of this truth; it is accessible only to "Gefühl," and even then only incompletely. Prigge-Kruhoeffer states that in Kleist's essay Über das Marionettentheater the possession of unconscious "Gefühl" is depicted as identical with the possession of truth, but conscious reflection, human thought can only destroy it.

> Der Mensch verliert die Wahrheit, sobald er sich des Gefühls bewusst wird, sobald er dem Gefühl einen Inhalt gibt,

> sobald er denkt. In dem Augenblick des Denkens irrt er schon. Wahr ist nur das G e f ü h l von einer ewigen Wahrheit. . . . Sobald dieses Gefühl sich an einen Inhalt hängt, denkt es schon, manifestiert es sich schon in der Welt, und die Welt enthält keine ewige Wahrheit--selbst die Liebe nicht (p. 61).

Prigge-Kruhoeffer next explores the question of whether or not Kleist himself experiences this "Gefühl" in regard to nature. Stated in different terms, is Kleist a pantheist, does Jupiter in Amphitryon speak for him?[14] The conclusion at which Prigge-Kruhoeffer arrives is that nature is for Kleist no immediate bridge to God. Nature has something of completeness about it, but gives "Sicherheit des Gefühls" only to woman, for only she is still bound immediately to nature. The Virgin Mary, claims Prigge-Kruhoeffer, is for Kleist the crowning example of such a "Naturwesen." But Kleist himself possesses this "Sicherheit des eigenen Gefühls," through which life's puzzles are solved, only rarely. He can at most depict it as a constant, significant force in dream and fantasy, in his creative works, as he does in Das Käthchen.

Although his anti-Napoleonic efforts, concentrated in the years 1807 to 1809, give Kleist a temporary goal, his latter years are supposedly characterized by a withdrawal from life, for he has lost all sense of purpose. "Kleist träumt nur von der ewigen Wahrheit" (p. 73); consequently, according to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, all of his later works have a dreamlike quality.

What happens to God in this dream-world? "Da Kleist den Gott in der Welt nicht finden kann, die Sehnsucht nach ihm nie verliert, so bleibt ihm nichts übrig, als dieses Gefühl zwischen Mensch und

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[14]See Werke, I, p. 290, ll. 1420ff.

Mensch ausleben zu lassen" (p. 74). Kleist, we are told, assigns divine attributes to various powerful characters in his works, such as the Great Elector, the Kaiser in Käthchen, Hermann, Jupiter, and Kohlhaas' Elector of Brandenburg. Biblical language is used to characterize them, intensifying the religious pathos surrounding them. They move with serenity and grace, for Kleist has endowed them with what Prigge-Kruhoeffer terms an esthetic equilibrium which compensates for the defective, inadequate moral world order. But this esthetic equilibrium gives Kleist himself only temporary refuge; he is unable to maintain permanent balance. He gradually succumbs to his "Lebensangst," flees reality and longs for death. In the last days of Kleist's life his God becomes more personal, One to whom he is able to pray. And death itself Kleist finally accepts with humility and gratitude.

In certain respects Prigge-Kruhoeffer's work is clearly superior to the two studies previously discussed. Her argument is much more complete and systematic than is Sauer's; it attempts to take into account the total complex of Kleist's experience, and makes extensive appeal to evidence contained in many of Kleist's letters and all of his dramas and Novellen, except Die Heilige Cäcilie and Das Bettelweib von Locarno. Prigge-Kruhoeffer also attacks her subject with a good deal more objectivity than Braig's work exhibits; she attempts by and large to derive her argument from the relevant documents instead of superimposing a preconceived scheme on the material at hand, as Braig does. As a result, although one may disagree with certain of her emphases, the study itself is obviously

grounded upon Kleist's works, and does not forsake a direct analysis of them in favor of abstruse speculation.

On the whole, however, her analysis of Kleist's life and works is not totally satisfactory. Her study does not provide convincing answers to certain key questions, and some of her emphases and conclusions give rise to additional questions and even objections.

First of all, is she justified in terming Kleist's fear of "Zufall," his "Schicksalsangst," the "Triebkraft seiner Lebens-äusserungen, das Fundament, auf dem sich auch seine Religiosität aufbaut?" (p. 11). His "Lebensplan," his intense interest in "Bildung," his Guiskard effort, his emphasis on duty, his patriotic activities--all are represented by Prigge-Kruhoeffer as Kleist's attempts to protect himself from the menace of "Schicksal," which in her opinion is identical to "Zufall." Napoleon too, she tells us, is hated by Kleist because he represents "Zufall," and it is this same domination of chance or fate in human affairs which is responsible for the "Gebrechlichkeit der Welt," its "allgemeine Not." Now it is obvious that particularly at certain times in his life Kleist was disturbed by what he saw to be the power of Zufall in human existence. But one wonders whether it is legitimate to attribute to this particular anxiety such diverse phenomena as his hatred of Napoleon and his keen interest in Bildung. Does this rather simplistic approach, this blanket formula touch the heart of the so-called Kantkrise? Other critics, such as Gerhard Fricke, whose work will be discussed next, see the essential Kleistian problem in terms quite different from those of Prigge-Kruhoeffer, and with

good reason.

In a related vein, it should be asked whether this allegedly primary motive force, Kleist's Schicksalsangst, informs to an equal extent all, or most, or even many of his creative works. It seems to me that one is compelled to give a negative answer to this question. Critics generally agree that fate is a vital factor in Kleist's first drama, Die Familie Schroffenstein. However, fate plays at best a far less conspicuous role in Kleist's other works. In that connection it is curious to note that Prigge-Kruhoeffer devotes more space to a study of Schroffenstein, a product of Kleist's youth, than she does to any of his later works, written in his more mature years. In summary, it is quite clear that fate as a menacing force constitutes a vital element in the religious thought and creativity of Kleist's earlier years. But do his later works and experiences warrant an extension of this presumed emphasis on into the years of his maturity and throughout his entire life? In my opinion, this particular aspect of Prigge-Kruhoeffer's argument cannot be substantiated with convincing evidence from Kleist's creative works themselves.

A close look at the configuration of Kleist's life as sketched in this article prompts other questions. As has already been noted, she states that after the burning of Guiskard in October, 1803, Kleist has "keinen Lebenszweck mehr. . . . Da Kleist keinen Lebenszweck mehr finden kann, weiss er kein anderes Mittel, sich vor der Zufallsangst zu retten, als seine Forderungen aus der Welt zurückzuziehen. Er gibt den Kampf auf, er r e s i g n i e r t. Kleist hat keine Gegenkraft, hat keinen Halt mehr, um sich dem

Zufall entgegenzustemmen" (p. 55). Although his alleged mood of resignation is from time to time briefly obscured by new hopes, it is Prigge-Kruhoeffer's opinion that "diese Resignation ist seit der Verbrennung des Guiskard grundlegend für den Rest seines Lebens" (p. 58). If this is the case it is clear that the great majority of Kleist's dramas and Novellen are products of this extended mood of resignation, of withdrawal. In fact, "seine späteren Dichtungen haben alle etwas Traumhaftes, der Wirklichkeit entrücktes," says Prigge-Kruhoeffer (p. 73). Now it is true that Kleist does at one point describe himself as "resigniert"[15] and that while he is in Königsberg he says that he writes only because he is "zu [nichts] Anderem brauchbar."[16] However, in underscoring these aspects of the last eight years of Kleist's life she invites distortion of the broader state of affairs. Although it is perhaps true that Kleist never was a happy extrovert, do Kleist's dramas, Novellen and letters substantiate her statement that resignation and a willed disengagement from life were permanent characteristics of these years? It seems to me that one can make a convincing case to the effect that, until the last months of his life, Kleist sought involvement, in fact, intense involvement in life. And is it not somewhat misleading to suggest that by and large during these years Kleist wrote merely because there was nothing else for which he was suited? Was not Kleist's writing rather a matter of great seriousness and intense urgency? He surely felt the problems and solutions given in his works to be of vital relevance for this life, here and now.

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[15]See Werke, II, 758. [16]See Werke, II, 769.

The communication of his insights in artistic form constitutes in a very real way a meaningful Lebenszweck. His writing is thus neither an incidental by-product of resignation nor a dreamland which serves as a refuge from life, but is rather an irresistible necessity. Prigge-Kruhoeffer's study does not show a full awareness of this fact.

One additional feature of this essay should be noted, since it results in misplaced emphasis in her discussion of certain works and, incidentally, also points to a basic difference between her picture of Kleist's basic concern and that drawn by Fricke, whose work is to be discussed next. The orientation basic to Kleist's "Lebensplan" she describes in the following lines:

> Kleist sucht mit seinem Lebensplan nach dem Gesetz des Lebens wie nach einer mathematischen Formel, in die man die dem menschlichen Verstande fassbaren Werte einsetzt, um die unbekannten mit Sicherheit zu errechnen. . . . Mit wissenschaftlichen Kenntnissen will er dem Weltgeschehen seine beunruhigende Unbestimmtheit nehmen. . . . Es kann sich. . . . bei dem Studienplan seines Jugendideals nicht um ein Einzelfach handeln, sondern um das Wissen überhaupt, um die letzten grundlegenden Wahrheiten, die in einem rationalistischen Sinn unsterblich sind (p. 11).

But Prigge-Kruhoeffer emphasizes the impact of rationalistic thought not only on Kleist's "Lebensplan" years; she also suggests that it exerts a recurring influence in his later life and creativity, even after Kant had permanently destroyed his hopes of attaining eternal truth by means of "Verstand." In her opinion, Kleist never reverts totally to his old Enlightenment Weltanschauung, but a residue of his earlier rationalistic religious concepts can be clearly seen in some of his later works. Thus the concept of God basic to his "Lebensplan" does not permanently disappear after the "Kantkrise," according to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, but can be

detected in Der Zweikampf. "Am abstraktesten, identisch mit einer mathematischen Rechenaufgabe zeigt sich diese Gottheit in Kleists Novelle Der Zweikampf"(p. 13). She even goes so far as to say that the reappearance of these older trains of thought constitutes "den Grund für die Entstehung der Novelle," (p. 15) and that their presence gives the Novelle its unique Kleistian stamp.

Michael Kohlhaas is another Novelle supposedly showing traces of Kleist's earlier religious thought. "Der fanatische, zur Raserei werdende Wille zur Gerechtigkeit hat in Kohlhaas selbst seine Lebensquelle in einer Gottesvorstellung, wie sie der des Lebensplanes entspricht" (p. 26). In fact, Prigge-Kruhoeffer says that "der rationalistische Gottesbegriff, der dem Lebensplan zu Grunde liegt" attains "den Höhepunkt der künstlerischen Gestaltung" in Michael Kohlhaas (p. 29).

This concentration on presumably rationalistic elements in these later Novellen tends to obscure their essential meaning. This is particularly true in the case of Der Zweikampf, in which the workings of "Gefühl," a basically non-rational phenomenon, are of obviously central significance. One could, in direct contradiction to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, even defend the thesis that it is precisely this non-rational strain which makes the Novelle uniquely Kleistian, and not its supposedly rationalistic concepts of God and justice. To emphasize the latter element while virtually ignoring the former results in what appears to me to be an obvious misinterpretation of the Novelle and Kleist's basic concern itself. Her definition of the Rechtsgefühl which is central in Michael Kohlhaas shows a similar prejudice. The statement that Kohlhaas' "Rechtsgefühl" is not

something "das sich irrational dem an die Sinnenwelt gebundenen Verstand überlegen fühlt," but is in essence "eine juristische Gerechtigkeit, die ihre Belege aus dem Verstand holt" (p. 29), points at best to but one side of the issue, and tends to invite a distorted picture of what Kleist is actually saying in this particular Novelle. It indicates a failure to adequately appreciate Kohlhaas' quite irrational insistence upon the inviolability of his Ich in the face of repeated assaults made upon it. In fact, one can make a convincing case supporting the thesis that it is Kohlhaas' own quest for personal integrity and dignity which underlies his obsession with justice. Prigge-Kruhoeffer's remarks do not even touch upon this aspect of the case.

Finally, it has been noted that this article fails to acknowledge the central role of Gefühl in Der Zweikampf. Yet in fairness to Prigge-Kruhoeffer it must also be said that she is not completely oblivious to the significance of "Gefühl" in other works by Kleist. Amphitryon, we are told, explores "das Mysterium des Gefühls" (p. 62), and "Käthchen, die unbeirrt ihrem inneren Gefühl folgt, findet es am Ende bestätigt" (p. 71). However, throughout her essay she uses the term "Gefühl" quite loosely and in a variety of ways, and makes no real attempt at a definition of the concept. Furthermore, Prigge-Kruhoeffer tends to see "Gefühl" merely as a kind of escape for Kleist, as something which has validity only "im Traumleben" (p. 70). In doing so she tends to drastically minimize both its potential intrinsic power and its significance for Kleist as he lives his life from day to day in a painfully real world.

Gerhard Fricke's study, Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist,[17] which has exerted unequalled influence on the Kleist criticism of the last thirty-five years, was published in 1929. In the opening pages of his book Fricke points to what he considers to be the inadequacy of previous attempts to penetrate to the essence of Kleist, attempts which have utilized the historical-philological approach, metaphysical interpretation, or psychological analysis. In his opinion, most of the works employing these approaches reveal more about the critic than about the poet himself. Fricke, taking exception to the methods and aims of his predecessors, sees the unique task of literary history, and of his Kleist study in particular, to consist in the discovery of the essential "geistige Substanz, aus der und zu der der Genius lebt" (p. 4). This "Substanz," he claims, will rarely be synonymous with some system or idea, but will most often show itself "in einem verborgenen, alles durchdringenden, alles gestaltenden Lebensgefühl" (p. 4). This critical study is thus to concern itself with what Fricke terms the Kleistian "Grundgefühl," Kleist's "geistiges Urerlebnis." And because he sees this "Urerlebnis" to be basically a religious phenomenon, his book too is obviously of direct relevance to the subject of this dissertation.

In his attempt to identify the uniquely Kleistian "Grundgefühl" Fricke, like Prigge-Kruhoeffer, clearly recognizes Kleist's fear of "Zufall" and "Schicksal." "Gewiss, der Lebensplan war das

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[17]Gerhard Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1929). Throughout the remainder of this analysis of Fricke's study, page references to the work itself will be made in parentheses.

Instrument der Schicksalsmeisterung für den jungen Kleist" (p. 8), he writes. Kleist's early drama Schroffenstein he terms "d i e Zufallstragödie . . . denn tatsächlich ist das Schicksal hier ganz zum Zufall geworden, der vom Anfang bis zum Ende die einzige, unveränderte und gleichmässig herrschende, alles bewegende Wirklichkeit ist. . ." (p. 55). In his opinion, "Zufall" and "Schicksal" continue to be significant elements also in some of Kleist's later works and experience. Thus "die äussere Wirklichkeit" sketched in Michael Kohlhaas is, according to Fricke, "die in Zufall, Willkür und Bosheit gebrechliche Welt" (p. 135), and in terms reminiscent of those used by Prigge-Kruhoeffer, he states that Napoleon was for Kleist "das Bild der Willkür, die Personifikation des Zufalls" (p. 164). In Der Prinz von Homburg, Kleist's last play, the prince is confronted with "die zufallsdurchwirkte Endlichkeit" (p. 197), in Fricke's own words, and ultimately overcomes it.

It is obvious that Prigge-Kruhoeffer's study and that of Fricke show a common awareness of the significance of "Zufall" and "Schicksal" in Kleist's life and thought. However, the points of agreement between the interpretations of these two critics are far less decisive than the extensive areas of disagreement. One such area of disagreement centers about Kleist's relationship to the thought of the Aufklärung. As has already been noted, Prigge-Kruhoeffer emphasizes the influence of Enlightenment rationalism on both the youthful and more mature Kleist. In her opinion, Kleist's "Lebensplan" experience shows particularly strong traces of a rationalistic orientation. Fricke, on the other hand, maintains that "Kleists inneres Anliegen bei dem Lebensplan ist so unaufklärerisch

wie möglich und scheinbar ganz idealistisch" (p. 9). The Enlightenment, he reminds us, felt itself the rational master of reality; hence it could not experience in depth the anxiety which necessitated the construction of Kleist's "Lebensplan."

These two critics also differ sharply in their interpretation of specific dramas and Novellen. Der Zweikampf, written some years after the formulation of the "Lebensplan," shares its "rationalistisches Gerüst,"[18] in Prigge-Kruhoeffer's opinion. Fricke vigorously disagrees, asserting that this Novelle bears witness to a "Lebensgefühl" quite unrationalistic in essence, to the Kleistian imperative "inmitten der . . . Wirklichkeit der Welt und der verborgenen Wirklichkeit Gottes durch die Treue gegen das Gefühl im Absoluten zu existieren" (p. 149). And this, he tells us, is essentially a matter of faith.

Similarly, although both critics acknowledge Kleist's fear of Zufall and Schicksal, there is obvious disagreement as to the strength and significance of this fear in his life. In Prigge-Kruhoeffer's opinion, it is the all-pervasive, consistently dominant impulse in his experience, one which relatively early in his life overwhelms him. Consequently, with the burning of Guiskard Kleist supposedly withdraws from life, and his mood becomes one of enduring resignation. According to Prigge-Kruhoeffer, the bulk of his literary activity takes place during these years and gives evidence of the increasing intensity of this mood.

Fricke's work gives a radically different picture of the basic configuration of Kleist's life. In his opinion, Kleist does

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[18]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 15.

not simply succumb to these threatening forces, but instead overcomes them relatively soon, his creative works providing a record of this process of overcoming. In them one sees not only the posing of difficult questions and frustrating, tragic dilemmas, but also the possibility of a way out. Seen from Fricke's perspective, Kleist's works assume not only a new interest; they also are of vital significance in the quest for an understanding of the poet's "Lebensgefühl."

In order to set the background for a consideration of some of Kleist's key works as they are interpreted by Fricke, an effort should be made to identify this critic's concept of the primary motive in Kleist's experience. Fricke himself terms this motive Kleist's "geistiges Urerlebnis," which gives rise to his "Lebensgefühl" or "Grundgefühl." An attempt to explicate Fricke's concepts is at best difficult, since his ideas are couched in terms which at times seem to defy either re-statement or coherent, readable translation. For this reason, extensive use is made of direct quotation from Fricke's work itself.

Kleist's "Urerlebnis," his "Urentdeckung" is, in Fricke's own words, "das Erlebnis des Ich, als der letzten, heiligen Offenbarung des verborgenen Sinnes der Welt" (p. 60). This "Icherlebnis" is described as "metapsychologisch" and "überempirisch" in nature, "die unfassbare, als Grundgefühl aber unsere ganze Existenz tragende Voraussetzung alles menschlichen Daseins, der ungegenständliche, unobjektivierbare Quell, die perspektivische Mitte der ganzen psychologisch-individuellen Tatsächlichkeit mit ihrer Fülle von Anlagen und Möglichkeiten. . ." (p. 16). In other

words, Kleist experiences the primal reality of the "Ich" as the ultimate, unconditional, inescapable ground of existence.

Fricke's discussion of the unique character of Kleist's "Urerlebnis" as it is set over against the dominant intellectual and esthetic currents of the late 18th century provides perhaps the most complete and convincing explanation of the nature of this phenomenon. For both rationalism and German idealism, we are told, "das konkrete Ich" is not the primary, ultimate concern. Both of them bypass reality, i.e., the concrete reality of the existing person in the here and now, and flee to abstractions, to intellectual concepts, to ideas. Classicism feels that it can escape the primal fact of the existing "Ich," that it can attain freedom for the abstract "Ich" in the abstract idea, says Fricke. And although the German Romanticists arrive at the experience of "Gefühl," their concept of this phenomenon is radically different from that of Kleist, for Romantic "Gefühl," in Fricke's opinion, also hovers above and beyond the existential situation. The Romanticists discover the individual esthetically, but not in his absolute, existential seriousness. Thus Kleist stands out as a man apart from his age, for he can flee neither to the idea nor the dream, he cannot escape the stark reality of "das konkrete Ich" in the unavoidable maze of its existential relationships. "Für ihn gab es keine Lösung des Problems des Daseins an der konkret-existentiellen Situation v o r b e i, sondern nur durch die hindurch" (p. 37).

Furthermore, Fricke depicts Kleist's existential concern as one which is essentially religious in nature: "Erst von Gott, von der religiösen Wirklichkeit her, um deren Gewissheit Kleist so verzweifelt

rang, erhält sein Existenzproblem, sein Erlebnis von Ich und Welt seine Tiefe, seine Leidenschaft, seine unabweisbare Dringlichkeit und seine 'Unbedingtheit'" (p. 38). In the closing lines of the same paragraph Fricke supplements the above statement with the following explanatory comments:

> Bei Kleist erhielten das Ich und die Wirklichkeit ihren ewigen, aller Mystik dauernd widerstrebenden Ernst dadurch, dass beide geschaffen und gehalten waren von der ewigen Wirklichkeit Gottes. Daher ist die ethische Frage Kleists, die immer neue Frage nach dem Sinn des Ich, Jetzt und Hier, nach der jeweiligen konkreten Situation, so dringlich und ernst, weil mit ihrer Beantwortung die religiöse Existenz zusammenhängt (p. 39).

In other words, Kleist seeks to know within concrete reality the intention of the Divine Will, of the Eternal Source of the self and reality. The goal of his religious quest is not the appropriation of abstract truth; rather, he seeks personal, eternal certainty in his own existential situation. It is precisely this factor, in Fricke's opinion, which accounts for the desperateness of Kleist's searching.

The figure Alkmene in Amphitryon bears witness to the fact that Kleist has found the ultimate and pure source of the Eternal, of certainty, in the midst of the uncertain and finite. This source, says Fricke, is the "Ich," which is rooted in and proceeds from its Divine Origin. Thus the law within has a religious source, and it is precisely from this source that the "Ich" gets what Fricke terms its "metaphysical depth." This "metaphysisches Ich," to use Fricke's words again, is the source of Kleist's "heilige Bestimmung." "So ist die Treue gegen den eigenen Dämon und der Gehorsam unter Gottes Willen und die Erkenntnis der irdischen Bestimmung zu einer Einheit zusammengefasst" (p. 75).

At this point the vital function of "Gefühl," termed by Fricke the "Hieroglyphe des kleistischen Wesens" (p. 29) becomes evident. "Das Gefühl aber ist der Widerschein dieser heiligen Selbstgewissheit des Ich um seine Bestimmung, es ist die unmittelbare, momentane Einigung des psychologisch-vordergründlichen Bewusstseins des Ich mit seinem metapsychologischen, ewigen Existenzgrunde" (p. 75). "Gefühl," says Fricke, is the conscience of the "Ich," an absolute imperative, which may under no circumstances be violated. Thus the immediate certainty of the "Ich" is not transmitted through consciously willed cognitive processes; instead this certainty is expressed "am reinsten als augenblickliches Gefühl, da ja die Relation zur Welt, die das psychologische Dasein konstituiert, immer nur für den Moment unterbrochen werden kann" (p. 76). The voice of "Gefühl" is in a real sense the voice of God, which in brief, illuminating flashes provides certainty of direction, the certainty for which Kleist longed so passionately: "In dem absolut-individuellen, existentiellen Vorgang des Gefühls tut sich der geheimnisvolle Weg zum Ewigen, zum Herzen der Dinge auf, und das Ich fühlt . . . was für es selbst die Forderung des Jetzt und Hier bedeutet" (p. 31). It is this concept of "Gefühl," says Fricke, which is the key to an understanding of Kleist and his individual creative works.

Die Familie Schroffenstein is seen by Fricke to be a document of Kleist's early despair. "Es ist die Verzweiflung des existierenden Ich, das in all seinen Relationen zur Wirklichkeit des Ewigen bedarf, am Sinn s e i n e s Daseins, an der Erkennbarkeit s e i n e r Bestimmung" (p. 45). In Fricke's opinion, this play depicts the unsolvable nature of the "Existenzproblem" as it is manifest in four

directions: the relationship of the "Ich" to the "Du," to reality, to moral responsibility, and to God. The pure relationship which develops between Ottokar and Agnes does suggest the possibility of bridging the cleft between the "Ich" and the "Du," we are told. But in this play "Vertrauen," the necessary basis of such a meaningful relationship, is literally overwhelmed by "Misstrauen," to which both Ottokar and Agnes fall victim. Furthermore, reality has become fate's plaything, and life is no more than a meaningless farce. God Himself is at best a puzzle; we cannot know what he wants of us, or even whether he is speaking at all. This, Fricke tells us, is the dark world of Kleist's immediately post-Kantian experience.

But this is by no means Kleist's final assessment of the human situation; there is a way out, a way of discovering meaning despite the ambiguity and confusion which seem to permeate existence. Amphitryon, Kleist's next complete drama, contains the formula, as it were, by which one can maintain personal integrity and a meaningful existence. According to Fricke, the basic theme of this drama is "dass der Mensch in dem Gefühl seiner selbst, in der unmittelbaren Einheit mit seinem ewigen Ich eine Kraft besitzt, die ihn nicht wanken lässt, an der die ganze widersprechende Wirklichkeit zerschellt" (p. 85). Alkmene's actions and ultimate fate show the victory of the eternal power of "Gefühl" through which she maintains personal purity, despite the baffling and deceptive reality which challenges her. Guided by her unerring, though badly shaken "Gefühl," the voice of the Eternal within concrete reality, Alkmene knows and fulfills her destiny. Thus, in Fricke's opinion, the bleak world of Schroffenstein is replaced by a world in which meaning can be

found through fidelity to "Gefühl."

The theme of Penthesilea as interpreted by Fricke is strikingly similar to that of Amphitryon, for it reveals that "das Gefühl, . . . dem der Mensch durch Schmerz und Verzweiflung hindurch treu bleibt, . . . [ist] stärker als alles Schicksal" (p. 121). Penthesilea has been subject to the unnatural and capricious law of Tanais, which has made her as queen the impersonal tool of the Amazon state and has deprived her people of their innermost subjective existence. Upon seeing Achilles, however, she awakens to her "Ich," to "Gefühl," to the certainty of her personal destiny. It is to this inner law, "Gefühl," that she gives her obedience. Its power is revealed not only in her decision to leave her people, and in the gentle words of love which she speaks to Achilles; even her final violent outburst shows the terrible power of her offended "Gefühl" and is proof that her love stems from a holy and inviolable necessity. By obeying the law within her she frees both herself and her people from the law of Tanais. The death which she dies, says Fricke, is "nicht Schrecken, sondern Seligkeit, ist der Triumph des ewigen Gefühls" (p. 121). Her "ewiges heiliges Ich . . . verzehrt durch die Flamme des überschwenglich-triumphierenden Gefühls seine zeitliche Form und verlässt die Erde, die nicht mehr seine Herrlichkeit zu tragen vermag. . .". (p. 122).

This uniquely Kleistian focus on the "Ich" and "Gefühl" is a hallmark not only of the dramas, Fricke reminds us. Writing about Michael Kohlhaas he states: "Das Ich des Kohlhaas selber als die heilige und letzte, sinngebende und sinntragende Wirklichkeit inmitten der endlichen Welt ist der Held der Dichtung" (p. 124).

According to Fricke, the religious existence of Kohlhaas' "Ich" is threatened when the Junker, the courts and the Elector of Saxony treat him not as a person, but as a mere object, when he is deprived of the possibility of living out his personal destiny in freedom. "Der Grund seines Kampfes," writes Fricke, "ist ja gerade, dass seine P e r s o n im absoluten, religiösen Sinne verneint ist. . ." (p. 128). Therefore he must get satisfaction for the treatment accorded him if he is to exist as a person, and when recourse to law has been proved ineffective he resorts to violence. Because the holiness of his existence and its immediacy with God have been denied, he is duty-bound to avenge. When the state finally recognizes him as a person he can accept his death. However, this does not mean that Kohlhaas has betrayed his "Gefühl." In fact, it is precisely on its behalf, according to Fricke, that he willingly sacrifices his temporal existence.

The Marquise von O., says Fricke, is in essence another expression of the Kleistian "Grunderlebnis," namely, "das Verhältnis des existierenden Ich zu seinem Schicksal" (p. 136). Here too Fricke sees the triumph of a "Gefühl" absolutely certain of itself, despite the contradictory appearance of circumstantial evidence. Fricke gives his concept of the heart of this Novelle in the following lines:

> Und in diesem Augenblick, wo die ganze Wirklichkeit zum Spiel eines teuflischen Dämons wird, wo sich die Liebsten und Nächsten, mit denen die Marquise verbunden ist, von der Gewalt der Tatsachen bezwungen, schmähend und brutal von ihr abkehren, wo die Wirklichkeit ihren letzten Sinn verliert und zu einer einzigen, vernichtenden Anklage wird gegen ihr innerstes Gefühl,--da bricht aus einer geheimnisvollen Tiefe ihres Wesens eine Kraft hervor, die, unerklärbar aus ihrem bloss empirisch-psychologischen Dasein, sich stärker erweist als die

> ganze furchtbare Wirklichkeit. Nun spürt sie plötzlich, wie inmitten der verwirrenden Endlichkeit e i n e s ewig und unzerstörbar in ihr lebt: Die unzerstörbare Einheit mit sich selbst und mit Gott in der heiligen Gewissheit des reinen Gefühls. . . (p. 138).

The power she has drawn from within, Fricke tells us, is not merely psychological in origin, but is rather a religious phenomenon. "Sie stammt aus der unmittelbaren, absolut-konkreten und absolut-substantiellen Einheit des Ich mit dem ewigen Soll seiner Existenz, sie stammt aus der welt überwindenden Kraft des Gefühls, das hier das credo quia absurdum gleichsam auf einer neuen Stufe vollbringt" (p. 13).

The remaining interpretations included in Fricke's study are characterized by the same emphasis which marks the analyses summarized above--namely the focus on the existential significance of the "Ich" and "Gefühl." Therefore it is not necessary at this point to review in detail his comments of Der Zweikampf, Über das Marionettentheater, Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, Die Hermannsschlacht, and Der Prinz von Homburg. The following statements, sentence summaries of these final interpretations, serve to demonstrate that in Fricke's judgment, all of Kleist's works, and even his death itself, reveal the same orientation noted in the works already discussed. As has already been mentioned, Der Zweikampf, as seen by Fricke, gives expression to the Kleistian categorical imperative "inmitten der nicht mehr zum 'transzendentalen Schein' entwürdigten Wirklichkeit der Welt und der verborgenen Wirklichkeit Gottes durch die Treue gegen das Gefühl im Absoluten zu existieren. . ." (p. 149). Writing about Kleist's essay Über das Marionettentheater, Fricke states that it contains the attempt "das unsichtbare Zentrum all seiner Dichtung auszusprechen. . . . Dies Zentrum ist die

geheimnisvolle, verborgene Wirklichkeit des Ich. . . (p. 150). Illustrative of the thrust of this essay is Das Käthchen von Heilbronn which, says Fricke, testifies to the "triumphierende Unbedingtheit des Gefühls" (p. 155). In the Prinz von Homburg, we are told, a dual "conversion" takes place. On the one hand, the Prince awakens to his eternal "Ich," while on the other hand, the Elector is converted from objective idealism to an awareness of the divinity of the "Ich," of Gefühl." And finally, Fricke sees Kleist's death itself as an act performed in obedience to the will of God as it is revealed in the poet's holy "Gefühl."

Fricke's study has been generally recognized as an extremely significant contribution to the broad body of Kleist scholarship. As such, it has doubtlessly colored a great deal of the Kleist criticism published from 1930 to the present time. Furthermore, since it emphasizes that the Kleistian concepts of the "Ich" and "Gefühl"are religiously rooted phenomena, and that Kleist's concern is ultimately religious in nature, it is of peculiar relevance to this dissertation. Although one may at certain points disagree with Fricke's findings, a study of Kleist's religious orientation cannot proceed without taking cognizance of them. Consequently, the body of this dissertation will necessarily contain frequent references to Fricke's interpretations.

Ernst Beutler's essay "Der Glaube Heinrichs von Kleist"[19]

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[19]Ernst Beutler, "Der Glaube Heinrich von Kleists," Essays um Goethe, ed. Ernst Beutler (4. Auflage; Wiesbaden: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1948), I, 409.

is the only post-World War II attempt focussed specifically on an exploration of Kleist's religious outlook. Unfortunately it is basically little more than a seriously inadequate synopsis of Fricke's ideas, containing little or nothing in the way of original insight. Practically repeating Fricke verbatim, he speaks, for example, of the "kategorische Imperativ des Gefühls"[20] and the "Unbedingtheit des Gefühls,"[21] as hallmarks of Kleist's faith. Unmistakably clear echoes of Fricke can also be detected in the statement that "neben dem Glauben an das eigene Gefühl, neben dem Vertrauen zum Ich verlangt Kleist das Vertrauen zum Du."[22] An additional defect is this essay's extreme brevity; in seven very small pages Beutler deals with four dramas, two Novellen, and one essay. In short, this study simply does not qualify as a serious, independent effort.

It is curious that although the more contemporary biographers tend to pay scant attention to Kleist's religious thought, one need not read extensively to discover rather forthright differences of opinion in this area. Joachim Maass, for example, states that Kleist was "ein heidnischer Mensch," that as far as religion is concerned, Kleist, like Nietzsche, was "schlecht für sie begabt," and that "im Grunde seines Herzens war er ein Nihilist."[23] Curt Hohoff, however, maintains that "Kleist ist jedoch kein Zyniker und Nihilist geworden," and that "in seinen grössten Dramen berührt er stellenweise

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[20]Beutler, 416.

[21]Beutler, 418.

[22]Beutler, 420.

[23]Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens (Wien: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1957), pp. 36, 324, 384.

. . . eng die Geheimnisse des Christentums."[24] The sharp difference of opinion reflected in the above sets of quotations seems to indicate that, as far as Kleist's religious posture is concerned, the last word has not yet been said.

In summary, although most of the works dealing with the subject of Kleist's religion contain valuable insights, they are at the same time marred by substantial shortcomings. Sauer's study is of restricted value, since it is too brief and unsystematic and is lacking in objectivity. This lack of objectivity attains disastrous porportions in Braig's work. Simply stated, he imposes upon Kleist's works a theological structure which is not inherent in the plays and Novellen themselves. Although Prigge-Kruhoeffer's essay shows a less subjective approach to the problem, her overemphasis on Kleist's fear of fate leads to a faulty picture of the basic configuration of Kleist's life, and does not provide the key to an adequate understanding of the essence of his works. Beutler's essay, as we have seen, is both too brief and too unoriginal to be of real significance.

Fricke's penetrating work, on the other hand, is obviously of decisive value. However, it should be pointed out that first of all, his study leaves five Novellen and one drama basically untouched. It should also be noted that by and large Fricke does not discuss at any length Kleist's religion in its relationship to traditional Christianity, its central tenets, and its historical institutions.

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[24]Curt Hohoff, Heinrich von Kleist in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten ("Rowohlts Monographien," Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1958), pp. 8, 10.

For example, he merely suggests that Kleist's rejection of positive Christianity occurred in a way typical of eighteenth-century religious experience, without exploring the matter more fully. This is rather unexpected, since throughout his book Fricke emphasizes Kleist's uniqueness over against his contemporaries, but at this point he casually indicates that Kleist's experience is typical. The above comments are not to be construed as criticisms of the burden of Fricke's work; rather, they indicate that his study is not totally exhaustive and does not touch upon all of the broader aspects of Kleist's religious experience.

This dissertation cannot help but build upon Fricke's fine insights. Its emphasis is a bit different, however, and its scope somewhat broader than that of Fricke's work. It will first of all attempt to define Kleist's intellectual and religious milieu, with particular attention being given to the religion of the Enlightenment, the atmosphere in the orthodox Lutheran church of his time, and the religion of the officer caste. This review of these aspects of Kleist's background and milieu is meant to serve the central concern of this dissertation--the examination of Kleist's letters and creative works in an effort to analyze his personal religious orientation and to establish the nature of his relationship to historical Christianity, its basic tenets, and its historical institutions. The intention of this study is neither to force Kleist into a Christian framework nor to expel him from such a framework. Its aim is rather to contribute to a fuller understanding of Kleist as man and artist.

CHAPTER II

KLEIST'S RELIGIOUS MILIEU

Religious Currents in the German Enlightenment

An examination of Kleist's religious milieu will be grossly incomplete if it excludes brief mention of some of the basic characteristics and tendencies of the German Enlightenment, particularly as they relate to the religious situation in Kleist's day. Enlightenment thought was all-pervasive in 18th-century Germany, exerting powerful influence not only on such areas as the natural sciences, psychology and literature, but also, and in a particularly decisive way, on religion. Consequently, it is not at all surprising that some critics, prominent among whom is Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, assign a vital role to Enlightenment influences in Kleist's own intellectual and religious development.

It is impossible to imagine that young Kleist could have totally escaped the impact of the Enlightenment Lebensgefühl, since it was part of the very atmosphere which he breathed. His most influential teachers, Christian Ernst Martini[1] and particularly Christian Ernst

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[1]Martini served as Kleist's tutor until 1788, when Kleist was sent to Berlin for further education. Relatively little is known about Martini. See, for example, Richard Groeper's article "Kleists Lehrer Martini" (Neue Beiträge zu Heinrich von Kleist ["Schriften der Kleist-Gesellschaft," Vol. XV, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1933], 13). However, judging by the type of argument employed by Kleist in the letter to Martini in which he defends his decision to

Wünsch,[2] appear to have been quite thoroughly imbued with the spirit of 18th-century rationalism. Furthermore, his own earlier writings do, in fact, contain evidence of his acquaintance with at least some aspects of the thought of the Aufklärung. For example, the Denkübungen[3] with which Kleist plagued Wilhelmine von Zenge were taken over quite directly from Wünsch's Cosmologische Unterhaltungen, a book which for the most part exhibits somewhat shallow 18th-century Enlightenment thought. His drive for Bildung, his youthful moralizing approach to nature, the construction of his "Lebensplan," and his essay, "Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg des Glücks zu finden . . ."--all reveal to some extent the influence of the spirit of his age.[4] No one appears willing simply to consign Kleist to the ranks

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leave military service (Werke, II, pp. 472-486), it seems reasonable to assume that Kleist, at least, felt that Martini shared the basic goals and prejudices of typical late 18th century Enlightenment thought.

[2]After his resignation from military service Kleist studied natural science under Wünsch, who was at that time a professor at the University at Frankfut an der Oder, Kleist's native city. Wünsch's Cosmologische Unterhaltungen give ample evidence of his Enlightenment orientation, although it should also be mentioned that he held certain ideas, particularly in the realm of religion, which were quite unrationalistic in essence.

[3]Examples of such "Denkübungen" on which the patient Wilhelmine was to prove and sharpen her wit:

--"Was für ein Unterschied ist zwischen rechtfertigen und entschuldigen?"

--"Sind die Weiber wohl ganz ohne Einfluss auf die Staatsregierung?"

--"Wenn beide, Mann und Frau, für einander tun, was sie ihrer Natur nach vermögen, wer verliert von beiden am meisten, wenn einer zuerst stirbt?"

(Taken from Werke, II, pp. 508-509).

[4]Joachim Maass, referring to the "Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg des Glücks zu finden. . . ." states that "diese Gedanken kann man sonderlich originell kaum nennen; sie gehören zum Geistesgut der Aufklärung . . . sie repräsentieren das Mododenken der Zeit. . . ." (Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens [Wien: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1957], 19).

of the less penetrating Aufklärer, but it is obvious that particularly in his more youthful years he did not stand totally outside of the stream of Enlightenment thought and practice.

The 18th century in Germany, Das Zeitalter der Aufklärung, and particularly the first half of that century, viewed Vernunft, immutable and universally valid, as man's highest and noblest capability, and the key to ultimate knowledge of the universe, man himself, and even God. No longer did man deem it necessary to depend upon supernatural revelation or tradition for the answers to life's puzzles and ambiguities. To the less profound man of the Enlightenment, at least, all aspects of life were accessible to analysis and reason, including the ethical and religious spheres. In the opinion of Emil Ermatinger, even such a mature thinker as Lessing believed firmly in the "unbedingte Herrschaft des Verstandes."[5] Similarly, Hermann August Korff terms the goal of the Aufklärung nothing less than the "verstandesmässige Lösung aller Weltenrätsel. . . ."[6] Riddles were no longer to be tolerated in any areas, neither in the realm of religion nor ethics, natural science nor psychology, literature nor philosophy, for man now had the intellectual tools for solving them. The dream of the century, according to Ermatinger, was that "ratio" is the pathway to paradise, for it leads to knowledge, and through knowledge to power.[7]

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[5]Emil Ermatinger, Deutsche Dichter 1750-1900 (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1961), 73.

[6]Hermann August Korff, Geist der Goethezeit (4 vols.: Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung von J.J. Weber, 1923), I, 12.

[7]Ermatinger, 87.

Since Vernunft dictates nature's laws, man, who is himself a reasoning creature, can grasp these laws and learn how to direct nature and build his own culture. Consequently, his happiness obviously was no longer dependent on God's mercy or wrath, but was something over which he could exert direct control. A life characterized by the practice of reason and virtue, it was felt, would necessarily result in happiness and contentment, since, in the opinion of most of the early 18th-century Aufklärer, the world itself was harmonious and well-ordered, and thus the life of the individual was to correspond microcosmically to the well-ordered macrocosm. This, in general, is one commonly accepted view of the age of the Enlightenment.

However, as Ernst Cassirer reminds us,[8] this view is not complete. It dates back in large part to the Romantic critics of of the late 18th and early 19th centuries who neglected the virtues of the age and overemphasized some of its shortcomings--such as its lack of historical understanding and its naive acceptance of its own standards of judgment as absolute and final. The sweeping negative judgment which resulted from this unbalanced treatment of the era, according to Cassirer, has been uncritically echoed by many later historians as well.

The era of the Enlightenment is not, however, without its defenders, scholars who see in the age more than shallow rationalism. Cassirer suggests that an uncritical acceptance of the negative verdict of the Romantic movement on the "shallow Enlightenment" is

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[8]Ernst Cassirer, Die Philosophie der Aufklärung (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1932), "Vorrede," p. XIV ff.

inaccurate and unfair, since it ignores the depth of thought and positive achievements which also marked the age.[9] Karl Barth points to another defect in the typical generalizations about this age. He comments that the common caricature of the "typical" 18th century Aufklärer, with his optimistic faith in reason and his emphasis on utility, gives at best a partial picture of the times. "Gewiss, diesen Menschen hat es im 18. Jahrhundert gegeben und etwas von diesem Menschen hat wohl ein bisschen jeder einigermassen repräsentative Mensch im 18. Jahrhundert in seiner Weise an sich getragen."[10] However, Barth also draws attention to the Mephistophelean skepticism which was a prominent feature of the age, and to the spirit of resignation which marked the Lebensgefühl of such figures as Frederick the Great.[11] Korff too reminds us that in the greater minds of the later Enlightenment disillusionment and even skepticism eventually replaced the optimism of Leibniz' earlier disciples.[12]

Barth goes so far as to question this entire concept of "Enlightenment."[13] It was not, he maintains, an age in which only clarity and light reigned. The century also had its mystics, pietists, Rosicrucians, quacks, and Swedenborgians. Freeemasonry itself, commonly considered to be a typical expression of the so-called

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[9]Cassirer, "Vorrede," p. XV ff.

[10]Karl Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (3. Auflage; Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1960), 17.

[11]Barth, 17.

[12]Korff, I, 29.

[13]Barth, p. 16 ff.

Enlightenment spirit, assumed the form of a mystery religion, Barth reminds us.

Taking his cue from Walter Goetz, a contemporary German historian, he suggests that it might be more meaningful to term the century "Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus," which he defines in the following words:

> "Absolutismus" kann offenbar allgemein bedeuten: ein Lebenssystem, das gegründet ist auf die gläubige Voraussetzung der Allmacht des menschlichen Vermögens. Der Mensch, der seine eigene Kraft, sein Können, die in seiner Humanität, d.h. in seinem Menschsein als solchem schlummernde Potentialität entdeckt, der sie als Letztes, Eigentliches, Absolutes, will sagen: als ein Gelöstes, in sich selbst Berechtigtes und Bevollmächtigtes und Mächtiges versteht, der sie darum hemmungslos nach allen Seiten in Gang setzt, dieser Mensch ist der absolutistische Mensch . . . dieser absolutistische Mensch ist der Mensch des 18. Jahrhunderts. . . . [14]

It was an age in which man felt himself master of the world, of history, and of his own inner life. And 18th-century man, as master, felt compelled to give form to all that which he encountered. It is this will to form, a natural outgrowth of the spirit of autonomous man, which, in Barth's opinion, comes close to touching the heart of the intellectual and more broadly cultural manifestations of this century.

However, Barth is not in total disagreement with the more traditional commentators on the age, for he also terms the 18th-century vision one of "des vernünftigen Menschen in einer vernünftigen Welt."[15] He only wishes to remind us that alongside the rationalistic clarity espoused during this era, there was also a delight in the mysterious and even the occult. Thus to simply term the age one

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[14]Barth, 17. [15]Barth, 56.

of Enlightenment is to distort the actual state of affairs.

It is not at all surprising that in the 18th century the Church, ethics, and Christian theology itself also became subject to the critical scrutiny of "autonomous man," to use Barth's term, for no area of human knowledge or experience was considered to be exempt from criticism and rational analysis. Because of its critical attitude, which sometimes, particularly in France, amounted to nothing less than a radical rejection of all religion, the Enlightenment is traditionally described as being skeptical in tone and destructive of religion. Thus Henri Daniel-Rops, a contemporary Catholic church historian, says of the German Enlightenment that "despite all it had to say about religion, [it] ended by destroying the very foundations thereof. Once the rays of Enlightenment had scoured humanity, what was left of revelation, of belief in a personal God, in the infallibility of Scripture or in the authority of the Holy Church?"[16]

However, not all scholars share Daniel-Rops' totally negative evaluation of the impact of the Enlightenment upon religion. Gerald Cragg, in his The Church and the Age of Reason, emphasizes that the German Enlightenment was more a reform movement from within the Church than an attack upon it from outside. Although he scores the Aufklärung theologians for their prevalent superficiality and lack of warmth, he suggests that rationalistically-inclined 18th-century

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[16]Henri Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Eighteenth Century, trans. John Warrington (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1964), p. 59.

[17]Gerald Cragg, The Church and the Age of Reason ("The Pelican History of the Church"; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 248-249.

theologians like Semler made valuable, permanent contributions to Christian thought and scholarship.[17] Ernst Cassirer too challenges the traditional prejudices concerning the religious orientation of the Enlightenment. "Es [ist] unzulänglich und fragwürdig," he writes, "wenn man . . . die Aufklärung als eine in ihrer Grundtendenz irreligiöse und glaubensfeindliche Epoche betrachtet."[18] The Aufklärung, he insists, did not have a basically negative attitude toward religion, but just as it had unquestionable faith in the reformation of the world, so it also expected of religion that it reform itself. The Enlightenment was not interested in dissolving religion, he argues, but rather sought to give it new justification and foundation.[19]

Regardless, however, of how one assesses the basic posture and intentions of 18th century rationalistic theologians, it cannot be denied that a radical shifting of the intellectual and religious center of gravity occurred. No longer did traditional metaphysics and theology dominate and inform the various fields of knowledge. A bond between religious concepts and secular knowledge remained but the roles of these two areas were reversed. In reference to theology too Cassirer says that "das zuvor-Begründende wird in die Stellung des Begründeten, das bisher letzthin Rechtfertigende in die Stellung des zu-Rechtfertigenden gedrängt."[20] That is to say, no longer did theological concepts form the presupposition and unquestioned basis for valid knowledge in other areas; instead, the

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[18]Cassirer, 180.

[19]Cassirer, 181.

[20]Cassirer, 212.

theological concepts themselves were questioned and subsequently altered on the basis of reason and the knowledge attained in these other areas.

Although the Enlightenment seemed in many respects to be "eine Epoche des reinen Intellektualismus,"[21] it would be misleading to intimate that its interest in religion was motivated purely by an intellectual concern. In the words of Cassirer: "Denn so sehr die Aufklärung bestrebt ist, eine 'Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft' zu begründen, so sehr sucht sie sie andererseits von der Herrschaft des blossen Verstandes zu emancipieren."[22] The Enlightenment also felt its mission to be the restoration of religion as a pure moral and practical force in human affairs. Thus Christianity was not only to be made reasonable, to be adapted to the insights of gesunder Menschenverstand; it was also to be restored as an ethical force. Therefore the validity of a specific dogma was determined not only by its reasonableness, its rationality, but also by its positive effects on practical morality and piety. To the typical Enlightenment theologian the value of a traditional dogma for practical piety was fully as important, in Cassirer's opinion, as its reasonableness and rational nature.[23] Both of these concerns, the purely intellectual and the practically ethical, were determinative in the intended renovation of religion.[24]

The new critical attitude toward what formerly had been accepted on authority as religious truth resulted in decisive changes

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[21]Cassirer, 220. [22]Cassirer, 220.

[23]Cassirer, pp. 225-226.

[24]This dual current can be clearly seen, for example, in the thought of Lessing.

in the body of traditional Christian dogma. One of the most systematic studies of this process of change in 18th-century Enlightenment theology is Karl Aner's Die Theologie der Lessingzeit.[25] Aner reminds us that the theological transformation which took place did not occur abruptly, but was the result of a gradual, though decisive, shift in emphasis. The first stage in this transformation he terms the Wolffian stage, in which Vernunft was given the right to speak decisively in matters of faith. During this stage revelation was not rejected, but was allowed to coexist with Vernunft.

The second stage, termed by Aner the neological stage, dominated the scene from 1760 to approximately 1790, and rejected most of the prominent dogmas of historical Christianity. It removed what it considered to be the anti-rational elements from revelation, allowing the concept of revelation to remain, but supplying as its content religious Vernunftwahrheiten. The third and final stage in this process of change Aner terms the rationalistic phase. During this phase the critics were less concerned with the historical development of dogma than with a purely rational attack on dogmas in their 18th century form. In this stage, the identification of revelation and Vernunft was completed, and the traditional content of revelation was totally replaced by Vernunftwahrheiten. That is, historical content was completely removed from revelation, and was replaced by rational content. Thus far, Aner.

It is important to remember at this point that the period of theological activity currently under discussion continued well into

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[25]Karl Aner, Die Theologie der Lessingzeit (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1929).

Kleist's lifetime. Although the educated classes in late 18th-century Germany were by and large indifferent to religion, as Schleiermacher ruefully discovered, they could not be totally unaware of the vigorous, often public theological conflict which marked these years. The same thing can reasonably be said of Kleist. Although his compelling interest certainly was not formal theology, a person with his keen intellectual interests could scarcely remain untouched by the new critical attitude toward religion and the rationalistic religious currents of his day[26]--which were, after all, but another expression of the temper of the age in which he lived.

One of the first dogmas to be challenged and ultimately vehemently rejected by the 18th-century Aufklärer was the doctrine of original sin. In both France and Germany there was an emphatic rejection of the idea of man's inability to attain to the true and good without divine grace. Not only was this doctrine considered to be repulsive to the humanistic ideal of human dignity and freedom; it was also seen to be basically unreasonable. Man is not born in sin; he is instead born to virtue, and the 18th century saw the development of the cult of virtue. The practice of virtue, as the expression

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[26]Kleist's revered Prof. Wünsch (see footnote 2, page 46) attained a good measure of notoriety as the alleged author of a volume entitled Horus, which was published in 1783. This theologically daring work, written in the tone of the Deists, contained radically heretical views on the doctrine and person of Christ and the origin of biblical doctrines, and caused a great uproar. Its publication even resulted in lawsuits and eventual confiscation. Although Wünsch vehemently denied authorship of this volume, his protestations were not widely believed in his own day. (See Flodoard von Biedermann, "Christian Ernst Wünsch," Euphorion, XX [1913], 405). We do not know whether Kleist was aware of this incident. Nevertheless, it is curious to note that a figure so greatly admired by him should be directly involved in theological controversy of this nature.

of true humanity, became the occasion for sentimental, even tearful reactions.[27]

A second area of contention centered about the work and existence of the devil. This topic was the subject of vigorous debate, particularly between the years 1760 and 1780. The end result of this discussion was the complete denial of the existence of the devil by the neologians.[28] They also disputed both the damnation of the heathen and the eternity of hell, since they considered these teachings to be unfair as well as unreasonable.[29]

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[27]Cf. the following excerpt, taken from Kleist's "Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg des Glücks zu finden. . . ": "Ja, mein Freund, selbst in Ketten und Banden, in die Nacht des finstersten Kerkers gewiesen,--glauben und fühlen Sie nicht, dass es auch da überschwenglich entzückende Gefühle für den tugendhaften Weisen gibt?" (Werke, II, 305).

He also views Christ, it seems, as a kind of hero of virtue: "Aber wer weiss ob Christus am Kreuze getan haben würde, was er tat, wenn nicht aus dem Kreise wütender Verfolger seine Mutter und seine Jünger feuchte Blicke des Entzückens auf ihn geworfen hätten" (Werke, II, 548).

In the "Aufsatz" mentioned above he makes the following comments in regard to Christ's death: "Er vergab sterbend seinen Feinden, er lächelte liebreich seine Henker an . . . ach die Unschuld wandelt ja heiter über sinkende Welten. In seiner Brust muss ein ganzer Himmel von Empfindungen gewohnet haben, denn 'Unrecht leiden schmeichelt grosse Seelen'" (Werke, II, 306).

[28]Kleist's Dorfrichter Adam in Der zerbrochene Krug apparently was not quite abreast of the times! In his nimble and humorous efforts to avoid implication in the affair of the Krug he states:

Mein Seel, ihr Herren, die Sache scheint mir ernsthaft.
Man hat viel beissend abgefasste Schriften,
Die, dass ein Gott sei, nicht gestehen wollen;
Jedoch den Teufel hat, soviel ich weiss,
Kein Atheist noch bündig wegbewiesen.

(Werke, I, p. 236, l. 1742).

[29]Cf. the following comments taken from one of Kleist's letters to Wilhelmine: "Man sage nicht, dass eine Stimme im Innern uns heimlich und deutlich anvertraue, was recht sei. Dieselbe Stimme, die dem Christen zuruft, seinem Feinde zu vergeben, ruft dem Seeländer zu, ihn zu braten, und mit Andacht isst er ihn auf . . ." (Werke, II, 683).

Kleist's primary concern in this quotation is not with the

No areas escaped the critical concern of the Enlightenment theologians, not even the pivotal Christian doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. The grounds for the rejection of this dogma were first, its unreasonableness, and second, its pernicious character, for it supposedly promoted moral laziness among Christians.[30] Both the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity were challenged and denied. Although the neologians and later rationalistic theologians did not consistently deny the concept of immortality, they did reject the traditional belief in the resurrection of the dead.[31]

The earlier neologians made extensive appeal to the Bible for substantiation of their theological positions. However, there was

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lot of the heathen in eternity, but with the problems involved in the perception of good and evil, and the issue of human responsibility. Nevertheless, these problems are clearly related to the questions leading to the eschatological concern of the neologians.

[30]In a similar vein, Kleist too apparently suspected that certain Christian dogmas and practices were conducive to moral laziness. The following quotation is taken from a letter to Wilhelmine: "Ich, mein liebes Kind, habe Ablass auf 200 Tage. In einem Kloster auf dem Berge 2 bei b, hinter dem Zitadell, lag vor einem wundertätigen Marienbilde ein gedrucktes Gebet, mit der Ankündigung, dass wer es mit Andacht läse, diesen Ablass haben sollte. Gelesen habe ich es; doch da es nicht mit der gehörigen Andacht geschah, so werde ich mich doch wohl vor Sünden hüten, und nach wie vor tun müssen, was recht ist" (Werke, II, 555).

[31]Kleist's early concept of immortality also deviated from that of traditional Christianity. In reporting his Kantkrise to Wilhelmine he states, for example: "Ich hatte schon als Knabe (mich dünkt am Rhein durch eine Schrift von Wieland) mir den Gedanken angeeignet, dass die Vervollkommnung der Zweck der Schöpfung wäre. Ich glaubte, dass wir einst nach dem Tode von der Stufe der Vervollkommnung, die wir auf diesem Sterne erreichten, auf einem andern weiter fortschreiten würden, und dass wir den Schatz von Wahrheiten, den wir hier sammelten, auch dort einst brauchen könnten" (Werke, II, 633).

among them an early break with the concepts of Biblical infallibility and verbal inspiration. Enlightenment theologians were generally skeptical of and even antagonistic toward the miraculous elements found in the Bible, and also denied that any miraculous effect could accrue from personal belief in the Biblical Word. The later neologians, according to Aner,[32] no longer appealed to the authority of the Bible, but rather sought to establish the validity of their conclusions by the use of "ethische Vernunft."[33]

As one might expect, there was also dissatisfaction with the traditionally accepted translations of the Bible itself. Consequently, new editions of the Scriptures appeared, works which attempted to paraphrase its contents. In these editions the Bible was usually divested of supernatural elements and recast into language inoffensive to enlightened Vernunft. Some of these paraphrastic efforts were well-meant scholarly attempts to make the Bible accessible to the age, while others, though perhaps well-meant, are notable for what can at best be termed a jarring lack of taste. It is interesting that Goethe, scarcely traditional in his religious convictions, heaped scorn on K.F. Bahrdt's effort, which was admittedly one of the more tasteless attempts at a Biblical paraphrase.[34]

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[32]See Aner, 34.

[33]In a letter to Wilhelmine dated May, 1799, Kleist echoes this emphasis: "Aber dieser [der Herrschaft der Vernunft] sollst Du Dich auch vollkommen unterwerfen. Etwas muss dem Menschen heilig sein. Uns beide, [sic] denen es die Zeremonien der Religion und die Vorschriften des konventionellen Wohlstandes nicht sind, müssen um so mehr die Gesetze der Vernunft heilig sein" (Werke, II, 491).

[34]One example of the paraphrastic violence Bahrdt does to the Scriptures is found in his transformation of Matt. 5:4, which in

In summary, the Enlightenment rejected historical Christianity--and all other positive religions--for reasons which reflected its dual basic concern. The first reason, mirroring the intellectual thrust of the movement, was that the usages and even the essential dogmas of revealed religions allegedly would not stand the test of Vernunft. The ethical emphasis of the Enlightenment was reflected in its second objection, namely that certain individual doctrines allegedly were not conducive to positive morality. Closely allied to this second consideration was the Aufklärung allegation that since each positive religion considers itself the sole authoritative religion, belief in them issues all too often in fanaticism, intolerance, hatred and even bloodshed.[35]

If traditional orthodox Christianity was rejected, what form did the religious life of the Enlightenment assume? Since no uniform pattern was evident, no simple answer can be given to this question. Regardless, however, of the variety of religious practices in the era, or even their absence, belief in the precepts of "Natural Religion" seems to have been a universal component in Enlightenment religious attitudes.

Karl Barth defines the 18th-century concept of natural

Luther's translation reads:

"Selig sind, die da Leid tragen; denn sie sollen getröstet werden."

to:

"Wohl denen, welche die süssen Melancholien der Tugend den rauschenden Freuden des Lasters vorziehen. . . " (Aner, 206).

[35]This theme finds expression, of course, in Lessing's Nathan der Weise.

religion as "eine allgemeine zeitlos gültige menschliche Möglichkeit darstellende Religion, die allen geschichtlichen, positiven, angeblich geoffenbarten Religion zugrunde liege, die in ihnen allen mehr oder weniger verdorben sei und auf die eine vernünftige Verehrung Gottes darum von allen Seiten zurückzugehen habe."[36] In other words, it consists of the essence supposedly basic to all revealed religions, while it rejects the various doctrines and elements which make each religion distinctive. Although this essence supposedly underlies all revealed religions, it is not a product of revelation itself, but is allegedly written into man's heart by the Divine Hand, and exists independent of all so-called revelation. Because it is inscribed in man's very being, it will never perish. The truths of natural religion center simply about God, virtue, and immortality. God is generally seen in somewhat abstract terms as the epitome of wisdom and goodness,[37] qualities which are also reflected in His world--man included; virtue as a quality of consummate beauty and the sole pathway to happiness and worldly prosperity"[38];

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[36]Barth, 211.

[37]Cf. another excerpt from Kleist's "Aufsatz": "Was mit der Güte und Weisheit Gottes streitet, kann nicht wahr sein" (Werke, II, 302).

[38]From Kleist's "Aufsatz" once again: "Wenn ich Ihnen so das Glück als Belohnung der Tugend aufstelle, so erscheint zunächst freilich das erste als Zweck und das andere nur als Mittel. . . . Es ist möglich dass es das Eigentum einiger wenigen schönern Seelen ist, die Tugend um der Tugend selbst willen zu lieben, und zu üben. Aber mein Herz sagt mir, dass die Erwartung und Hoffnung auf ein menschliches Glück, und die Aussicht auf tugendhafte . . . Freuden, dennoch nicht strafbar und verbrecherisch sei" (Werke, II, 302). Kleist does not tend, however, to equate "Glück" with material prosperity. In this same essay he states: "Ich nenne nämlich Glück nur die vollen und überschwenglichen Genüsse, die . . . in dem erfreulichen Anschaun der moralischen Schönheit unseres eigenen Wesens liegen" (Werke, II, 304).

and immortality as a necessity resulting at least in part from the absence of total justice in the present world. In the eyes of the Enlightenment, natural religion was consonant with Vernunft and promoted toleration; consequently, the best revealed religions were thought to be those which contained the fewest addenda to natural religion.

Although natural religion formed the core of religious belief for most Aufklärer, their religious practice was marked by a variety of tendencies. Some of them dispensed with a formal religious life altogether, for belief in natural religion did not necessarily require church membership or attendance. Others attended a type of religious service which had been adapted to the trends of the age with its cool, rationalistic tone. In such services Christ was perhaps depicted merely as a "purveyor of enlightenment and edification."[39] Sermons in such services tended to be either purely intellectual expositions of the latest neological thought, or practical secular lectures on such topics as the advantages of coffee or the ethical significance of hairdressing.[40] Some extreme examples of this trend in 18th-century sermonizing are given by A. L. Drummond: a Christmas sermon on stall-feeding of cattle, a Palm Sunday sermon on the damaging of trees, an Easter sermon on the danger of being buried alive, and a Pentecost sermon on drunkenness.[41]

Not all Enlightenment religious practice was characterized by this secular tone and unimaginative lack of warmth, however. For

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[39]Andrew Drummond, German Protestantism since Luther (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), 86.

[40]Drummond, 102.

[41]Drummond, 102.

example, Friedrich Nicolai, an arch-Enlightener whose writings are thoroughly permeated by the rationalistic spirit of the Aufklärung, practiced a kind of simple piety which involved, among other things, the reverent reading of the New Testament, regular attendance at Lutheran worship services--communion services included, and a genuine personal appreciation of traditional "geistliche Lieder."[42] Although Nicolai thus did not feel hostile to the church and conventional religious practices, he did reject basic orthodox doctrines relating to sin and the operation of divine grace. His belief, at least in Aner's opinion, though marked by a relatively warm emotional tone, did not ultimately encompass more than the so-called truths of natural religion.[43]

In summary, since one finds among the men of the Enlightenment a wide variety of attitudes toward the church and traditional religious practices, it is impossible to make valid generalizations in this area. This diversity does not, however, negate the greater degree of unanimity in their basic religious convictions, which were generally rooted in natural religion.

Among the revolutionary religious documents of the century two stand out as having created perhaps the greatest public sensation. The first of these is Rousseau's "Confessions of a Savoyan Vicar,"

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[42]It is curious to note that Kleist too, according to one witness, was extremely fond of geistliche Lieder. E.F. Peguilhen, a friend of both Kleist and Henriette Vogel, his partner in suicide, states: "Ich selbst bin Zeuge gewesen, dass er und Mad. Vogel ganze Abende am Fortepiano gesessen, und geistliche Choräle gespielt, und zusammen gesungen haben" (Heinrich von Kleists Lebensspuren, ed. Helmut Sembdner [Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1957], 353).

[43]Aner, 121.

contained in the educational novel Emile, published 1762, and the second is the Wolfenbüttel Fragmente of Reimarus, published by Lessing between the years 1774 and 1778. Although these two documents are by no means identical in tone, they are in certain basic respects similar. Reimarus' Fragmente contain, in Barth's words, "eine grundsätzliche Bestreitung der Notwendigkeit und Möglichkeit aller, besonders aber auch der biblisch-christlichen Offenbarung auf dem Hintergrund des durchgeführten Begriffs einer rein natürlichen [Religion]." This concept of natural religion, Barth continues, is "grundsätzlich dieselbe Reduktion, wie wir sie in dem kurz vorher entstandenen Bekenntnis des savoyardischen Vikars bei Rousseau kennen."[44]

The "Confessions" are of particular interest in this study, since the younger Kleist was an enthusiastic admirer of Rousseau, and in a letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge recommended that she finish reading Emile prior to taking up Rousseau's other works.[45] It is true that he does not at any time single out the Vicar's "Confessions" for particular praise. However, his endorsement of the book is nevertheless significant, since the religious spirit of this segment of Emile permeates the entire novel.

Rousseau's views, as expressed in the "Confessions" were by

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[44]Barth, 211.

[45]Cf. Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine dated March 22, 1801: "Es hätte sich nicht leicht ein Umstand ereignen können, der imstande wäre, Dich so schnell auf eine höhere Stufe zu führen, als Deine Neigung für Rousseau. . . . Das zweite Geschenk, das ich Dir . . . machen werde, wird das Geschenk von Rousseaus sämtlichen Werken sein. Ich werde Dir dann auch die Ordnung seiner Lesung bezeichnen--für jetzt lass Dich nicht stören, den Emil ganz zu beendigen" (Werke, II, 632).

and large typical 18th-century views: belief in a God revealed by reason to be gentle and good, the natural goodness of man, the immortality of the soul, and virtue as the only road to true happiness. At the same time Rousseau emphatically rejected belief in the traditional concept of hell, the damnation of the heathen, non-rational elements in the Scriptures, and above all, intolerance. Some scholars claim to detect the direct positive influence of Emile on Kleist's religious attitudes. For example, Ernst Cassirer perceives in Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine, written August 15, 1801,[46] clear echoes of the Savoyan Vicar's "Confessions."[47] Regardless of whether or not such influences did exist, it can at this point be affirmed that young Kleist also was aware of the typical 18th-century "enlightened" attitude toward Christianity as voiced by Rousseau, and apparently did not react negatively to it.

In conclusion, Heinrich von Kleist was born into a culture which, generally speaking, placed a premium not on the acceptance of traditional religious truths by faith, but rather on the critical-analytical approach to Christianity and its body of dogma--an approach which resulted in the radical alteration or even deletion of traditional concepts of sin and salvation, man and God. Although, as has been previously noted, the Enlightenment was not without a strong ethical concern, its marked intellectualism certainly did not tend to foster warm, personal piety. The religious posture of the St. Augustine who said that "our hearts are restless until they find their

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[46]Werke, II, 680.

[47]Ernst Cassirer, "Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie," Idee und Gestalt (Berlin: Bei Bruno Cassirer, 1921), 179.

rest in Thee" was to a great extent replaced by a restlessly critical attitude toward traditional Christianity as articulated in its basic dogmas, or by an urgent ethical activism. In some cases a cool and often insipid secularism dominated religious life. In other cases the cult of virtue was in vogue, accompanied by tearful sentimentalism. In still other instances vestiges of traditional piety served to warm an abstract rationalistic religious residue. In any case, the emphasis on Glauben was largely replaced by an emphasis on more abstract Denken or on Tun--or a combination of the two. Whether a man with Kleist's disposition could be permanently satisfied with any one of these 18th-century religious emphases is questionable. However, before one can make a final judgment in this matter it is necessary to briefly examine the other religious options open to him.

The Church in the 18th Century--Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism

Although Enlightenment religion was prominent in the later half of the 18th century, it could not claim the allegiance of the masses of the German people. Traditional orthodox piety retained its hold on the common man, although within orthodox circles themselves there were significant differences in emphasis. In many Lutheran churches a rather arid scholasticism dominated religious life, while in others the warming influences of Pietism were felt. In any case, it is certain that traditional Christianity had a sizable body of adherents in Kleist's day, and that, at least in theory, it constituted a religious option for Kleist himself.

A brief historical sketch of the most prominent post-Reformation tendencies within Lutheranism will provide background for an understanding of the state of the Evangelical church in the 18th century, and particularly its closing decades, which were at the same time the years of Kleist's youth and early manhood.

Soon after the death of Martin Luther, the basic Reformation emphasis on a living Christianity, centered in a vital and vibrant relationship between the believer and his God, was to a great extent replaced by what is commonly termed the new Lutheran scholasticism. Intense, even violent doctrinal disputes were common, both within Lutheranism and between Reformed and Lutheran theologians. More than occasionally, subtle, often purely academic theological distinctions furnished the occasion for vehement polemics and even persecution. Melanchthon, we are told, accepted death gratefully, for it provided escape from the "rage of the theologians." Although it obviously would be grossly inaccurate to assert that genuine piety disappeared from protestant religious life, it is equally obvious that the emphasis on intellectual conformity to dogma became increasingly strong.

The Thirty Years War, despite all of its destructive fury and the intense human suffering it caused, failed by and large to redirect religious energies into more fruitful channels. The writings of men like Johann Arndt and Paul Gerhardt indicate that genuine Christian piety was by no means extinguished. Nevertheless, the theological preoccupation with argument, logic, definition and dogma continued, and in the opinion of some church historians, became

even stronger after the Thirty Years War.[48] It was in reaction to the formalism and aridity which dominated 17th-century theology and church life that Pietism arose.

Pietism, which began to flower particularly in the final decades of the 17th century, is termed by Gerald Cragg "the protest of a living faith against a lifeless and unbending orthodoxy."[49] Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), the two most prominent leaders of the movement, emphasized the importance of the heart, of religious feeling, of a personal conversion experience, of prayer and devotional Bible study. They were convinced that the essence of Christianity was more than intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions; it was a life of personal faith--a faith which touched all of human existence, including its social aspects. Franckean Pietism in particular laid heavy stress on social involvement and betterment as the natural result of personal conversion, for Christianity was, after all, the "practice of a transforming way of life."[50] Both the earlier brand of Pietism associated with Francke and Spener, and Moravianism,[51] under the leadership of Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1766) showed intense

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[48]See, for example, Drummond, 28.

[49]Cragg, 100. [50]Cragg, 101.

[51]Although Moravianism is termed by Drummond "the last great outburst of Pietism" (see Drummond, 68), it was in one essential respect different from conventional Pietism. These two groups were to a considerable degree characterized by similar religious attitudes, but the Pietists remained within the organized church, while the Moravians formed a totally separate ecclesiastical organization. Needless to say, both the conventional Pietists and Orthodox Lutherans disapproved of this separatism.

missionary fervor, sending members to staff mission outposts throughout the world. In short, Pietism considered Christianity to be not essentially a concern of the intellect, but of the heart--affecting life as it is lived from day to day.

Although it is generally agreed that Pietism exerted a strong positive influence on the religious life of the day by breathing warmth into an ossified theological structure, it too was not without defects. Some of its adherents quite totally neglected the intellectual element in religion.[52] The somewhat narrow outlook and intellectual timidity of many Pietists resulted in a neglect of natural revelation. There was furthermore a tendency among some of them toward sentimentality, excessive emotionalism and fanatical mysticism. Pietism itself tended in its later stages to become legalistic and restrictive--making of conversion "a conventional sequence of prescribed experiences."[53] And finally, among some of the Pietists there was undoubtedly a distinct tendency toward withdrawal from the world with its concrete problems. However, Pietism's virtues, in the opinion of most church historians, far outweighed its defects.

By 1740 Pietism as a distinct religious movement had clearly passed its peak of influence. Nevertheless, it continued to constitute, in varying degrees, an element in the religious life of the common man. Thus, although the pietistic current was a far less prominent feature of religious life after mid-century than it had been, it never was completely stopped up--not even during the heyday

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[52]Zinzendorf reputedly once said that faith is "a light in the heart," and that "he who wishes to comprehend God with his mind becomes an atheist" (Drummond, 68).

[53]Cragg, 106.

of the Enlightenment.

It would, of course, be grossly misleading to suggest that 18th-century Lutheran scholasticism was at any time completely engulfed by the tide of Pietism, or that early 18th century Pietistic influences ever wrought a total transformation of orthodox Lutheranism. Karl Hagenbach, describing the religious situation of 1740, states that "fresh, evangelical, courageous faith" had degenerated into "a mere effete orthodoxy."[54] In his opinion, at least, the aridity which had characterized 17th-century orthodoxy was not permanently affected as a result of its contact with Pietism.

However, the same orthodoxy which, with some success, had resisted the influence of Pietism, was not equally successful in defending itself against the onslaught of the Enlightenment on traditional Christianity, as it occurred particularly in the latter half of the 18th century. Consequently, rationalism made deep inroads into orthodox belief. Some orthodox believers continued to seek a balance between Gefühl and Verstand in their religious faith; however, in Hagenbach's opinion, "with but few exceptions, both the so-called believers in revelation and in reason of that day occupied the same ground of dry, abstract intelligence."[55] The result once again was a cool, dry, intellectualistic religion, whose emotional tone was scarcely less barren than that of rationalistic Deism.[56]

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[54]Karl Hagenbach, History of the Church in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, trans. John F. Hurst (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), I, 104. This work was available to me only in English translation.

[55]Hagenbach, II, 106.

[56]One Christian Samuel Ulber, a devout, pietistically inclined German pastor who served in Hamburg during the 1760's,

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Bernd Heinrich Wilhelm von Kleist, according to an entry in the parish register of the Frankfurt garrison, was baptized as a member of the Lutheran church on October 27, 1777, some nine days after his birth.[57] A later entry in the register, made by one Chaplain Krüger, contains the information that Kleist's confirmation occurred on June 20, 1792,[58] shortly after his entry into military service and well past the date of his fourteenth birthday.

Aside from these few facts, we know very little about Kleist's early religious background. Nor is there a great deal of information available as to the religious orientation and convictions of his forbears. We do know that his paternal grandfather, Bernd

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poignantly voices his dismay at the emphases noted above. Although the reaction of the general public to a devotional book he has recently written has been enthusiastic, scholarly reactions to it apparently have been somewhat restrained in tone. This fact occasions the following revealing lament on Ulber's part:

> "Den geheimen Vorwurf habe zwar vernommen, dass meine Abhandlungen zu wenig Gelehrsamkeit und tiefe Einsicht bewiesen, dass ich die voran und zum Grunde gesetzte Stelle aus der Bibel sowol nach ihren historischen Umständen, als nach der Grundsprache und ihrer wörtlichen Bedeutung nicht gnugsam zergliedert und erklaeret, ingleichen dem Rechte der Natur und der Vernunft mit ihren Gründen und Rathschlägen zu engen Platz gelassen hätte. Ein gewöhnlicher Tadel der heutigen Welt, und ach! auch der Christenheit, die immer griechischer wird, und nur nach Weisheit fraget, die so lange zergliedert, und dem Verstande so viel vorlegt, dass für das arme Herz fast nichts mehr übrig bleibt" (Christian Samuel Ulber, Der christliche Creuztraeger, oder erbauliche Betrachtungen ueber das menschliche Elend, des Leibes und der Seele, welche zur Erweckung der Sichern, zur Befestigung der Schwachen und zum Troste der Betrübten, unter göttlichem Beystande entworfen, und dem oeffentlichen Druck überlassen [4. Auflage; Hamburg: Druck und Verlag Johann Ludewig Schwarz, 1772], p. xvi).

[57] Lebensspuren, 1.

[58] Lebensspuren, 6.

Christian von Kleist, who served as Hauptmann in the Prussian army near the turn of the century, appears to have been a devout, orthodox believer[59] whose faith may well have been colored by the Pietistic currents which were especially strong in his day.[60] Judging by the tone of his "Kurze und gründliche Nachricht, . . ." which expresses evident concern about the spiritual welfare of his children[61] (one of whom was Heinrich von Kleist's father), it seems likely that he attempted to train them in the established orthodox Lutheran tradition.

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[59]Sigismund Rahmer in his Kleist-Problem quotes at length from a document written by Kleist's grandfather, Bernd von Kleist, entitled "Kurze und gründliche Nachricht von der Fundation und Erbauung der Kirche in Schmentzien nebst allen dabei verfallenen Schwierigkeiten" (Sigismund Rahmer, Das Kleist-Problem [Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1903], 166 ff). This Bernd von Kleist built a church in Schmentzien with his own funds as an expression of gratitude for divine blessing and protection. In the course of the "Kurze und gründliche Nachricht," in which he recounts the difficulties involved in the construction of the church, he also gives extended expression to his own religious convictions, which are to all appearances unfeigned, thoroughly orthodox, and traditional. The entire document breathes a spirit of warm personal piety and genuine concern for the state of Christianity, which its author feels to be deteriorating.

[60]The following lines seem, at least, to hint at the presence of a pietistic strain in the religious orientation of Kleist's grandfather: "Lernet erkennen," he admonishes his children, "dass Gott fürchten, die allergrösste Weisheit, und dass die süsse Liebe Jesu Christi alle Erkenntnis übertrifft" (Rahmer, 170). The original document contained a lengthy prayer, which Rahmer unfortunately does not quote, but which no doubt would make possible a more precise evaluation as to the tone of its author's Christianity.

[61]From the "Kurze und gründliche Nachricht . . .": "Der Engel, der mich behütet hat und erlöset bis hierher von allem Uebel, der segne euch, dass ihr nicht allein möget wachsen und viele werden auf Erden, sondern dass ihr auch möget Werkzeuge seiner [Gottes] Ehre werden zum Preise seines allerheiligsten Namens . . ." (Rahmer, 170).

Unfortunately, we know even less about the religious atmosphere in the home in which young Heinrich von Kleist himself received his earliest training. Curt Hohoff suggests that "die Erziehung im Elternhause . . . scheint starr, schematisch, lutherisch-orthodox und unpersönlich gewesen zu sein,"[62] without citing evidence for his contention. Kleist's parents were members of the Lutheran church, but there seems to be no decisive evidence available from which one can draw firm conclusions as to the religious tone present in the Kleist home. Since neither Heinrich von Kleist nor any of his contemporaries comment on the religious convictions of Kleist's parents, it would seem that they probably conformed to the common religious patterns prevalent in their day, and did not, in this respect, stand out as unusual. To say more than this is, in my opinion, to resort to speculation.

The significance of the fact that Kleist was "öffentlich konfirmiert"[63] in 1792 should not be overestimated, not only because he was relatively immature when confirmed, but also because confirmation itself apparently was often little more than a formality in the Lutheran church of the late 18th century. Furthermore, it might also be noted that confirmation was usually a formal prerequisite for membership in the Prussian officer corps which Kleist was destined to enter.

Kleist's letters tell us next to nothing about the nature of his church affiliation, the tone of the religious instruction

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[62]Curt Hohoff, Heinrich von Kleist in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten ("Rowohlts Monographien"; Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1958), 12.

[63]Lebensspuren, 6.

he must have received, or the character of the worship services he must have attended.[64] The fact that all throughout his life--including the times of great stress--he says so little about the church with which he was at least formally affiliated seems to suggest that although he obviously was brought up a member of the church, he did not regard his affiliation with it to be of decisive personal significance.[65]

Although a final determination of Kleist's religious posture must be deferred until a study of his works has taken place, it is at this point legitimate to comment on probable reasons for his rather loose affiliation with the orthodox church and its apparent lack of relevance for his life. In the first place, Kleist's formal

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[64]Kleist does make brief but somewhat contradictory comments as to the worship services of his confession. Contrasting the Lutheran service with which he is familiar to the Catholic Gottesdienst he writes in September, 1800:

> Bei uns erweckt doch die Rede des Priesters, oder ein Gellertsches Lied manchen herzerhebenden Gedanken; aber das ist hier bei dem Murmeln des Pfaffen, das niemand hört, und selbst niemand verstehen würde, wenn man es auch hörte, weil es lateinisch ist, nicht möglich (Werke, II, 555).

Less than a year later he evaluates the two services in quite a different light:

> Nirgends fand ich mich aber tiefer in meinem Innersten gerührt, als in der katholischen Kirche, wo die grösste, erhebenste Musik noch zu den andern Künsten tritt, das Herz gewaltsam zu bewegen. Ach, Wilhelmine, unser Gottesdienst ist keiner. Er spricht nur zu dem kalten Verstande, aber zu allen Sinnen ein katholisches Fest (Werke, II, 651).

Later pages of this dissertation will contain a discussion of the significance of this change in attitude.

[65]The following comment, contained in a letter to Ulrike dated May, 1799, appears to suggest an early rejection of traditional religious forms on Kleist's part: "Etwas muss dem Menschen heilig sein. Uns, beide [sic] denen es die Zeremonien der Religion und die Vorschriften des konventionellen Wohlstandes nicht sind, müssen um so mehr die Gesetze der Vernunft heilig sein" (Werke, II, 491).

education was not characterized by a traditional, orthodox religious orientation. Instead, in keeping with the times, it seems to have been thoroughly permeated with a somewhat shallow Enlightenment Weltschau, if one can make judgments on the basis of such documents as Kleist's letter to Martini in explanation of his decision to resign from the army,[66] his "Aufsatz, den sicheren Weg des Glückes zu finden, . . ."[67] and his letters containing Denkübungen for the long-suffering Wilhelmine.[68] The youthful Kleist tended to a great extent to see life in terms of such Enlightenment concepts as Vernunft and Bildung, Tugend and Glück--concepts which certainly did not depend upon orthodox sanctions for their validity, but which instead were at least in part in conflict with the traditional theological concepts of sin and grace. The ideal life, as the concrete realization of such concepts and goals, could be fully realized outside of any traditional ecclesiastical institution. Seen from this point of view, affiliation with any given denomination was at best superfluous.

Not only did Enlightenment thought to a great extent regard the orthodox church as institution to be superfluous; it also challenged the validity of doctrines basic to Christianity itself, as was noted earlier in this study. As a result, theology was "discredited both as to content and as to method."[69] Aner describes the situation in the late 18th century quite succinctly when, in

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[66] Werke, II, 472.

[67] Werke, II, 301.

[68] See, for example, Werke, II, 508-509.

[69] Drummond, 104.

reference to orthodoxy, he states that "die denkende Welt nahm von ihm keine Notiz."[70] Bruford goes so far as to claim that rationalism "alienated the great mass of the educated laity from religion altogether. . . ."[71] The intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in late 18th-century Germany being what it was, it would be little wonder if Kleist, certainly one of the "educated laity," should share its negative attitude toward the orthodox Lutheran church and its teachings.

Then too, in view of the arid intellectualism which, as we have previously seen at some length, characterized late 18th-century orthodoxy, one wonders whether Christianity ever had a real chance to make a significant impact on Kleist. His choice actually was between two relatively cold intellectual systems, those of the Enlightenment and dogmatic orthodoxy, the latter of the two generally considered in his day to be less reasonable than and logically inferior to the former. Christianity was scarcely presented, for example, as a warm, personal summons to a meaningful life in Christ (and Kleist certainly struggled fiercely to find meaning in his life), or as providing the ultimate answer to human loneliness (whose grip Kleist knew all too well), or as a relevant way of life which not only offers comfort and joy to the individual, but which also gives meaning and direction to social life and cultural activity. In the distorted form which it had assumed in Kleist's day, Christianity was detached from basic human needs, destitute of

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[70]Aner, 345.

[71]Walter Bruford, Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival (Cambridge: University Press, 1935). 253.

emotional warmth, and deprived of cultural relevance.

German Pietism was relatively free of some of these deficiencies--particularly the lack of warmth which generally afflicted orthodoxy. However, Pietism could scarcely be considered a live option for Kleist. In the first place, its period of prominence was long past by Kleist's day. It certainly had not died out in the latter half of the century, but its adherents were largely members of the less educated Bürger class.

Then too, Pietism tended toward radical anti-intellectualism in religion and a suspicious neglect of learning in general, tendencies which went quite contrary to the intellectual bent of the younger Kleist. Also, it is extremely doubtful that Kleist, who, at least in his younger years, shared many of the prejudices of his age, could have accepted the mystical elements prominent in Pietism, even if religion had not been out of vogue among the educated classes of his time.

The following quotation summarizes what is perhaps the basic difference between the 18th-century "autonomous man" of Barth[72] and the 18th-century Pietist: "Der Aufklärer will Gott die Regierung der Welt aus den Händen nehmen und autonom sein; der Pietist opfert Gott seinen Eigenwillen vollständig auf und will sich führen lassen. . . ."[73] Kleist, at least in his earlier years, wanted to be in firm control of his own life, to chart his own course--witness his "Lebensplan" effort--although he soon discovered that

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[72]See pp. 50-51.

[73]Gerhard Kaiser, Pietismus und Patriotismus im literarischen Deutschland (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1961), 13.

life did not allow itself to be so easily mastered. The Pietist, on the other hand, adopted an attitude of confident submission to the will of a personal God.

In summary, although Kleist was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran church, the institutional church seems to have been of relatively minor significance in his life. Various factors--the spirit of his age, the tone of his education, and possibly the unappealing aridity of Lutheran orthodoxy tended to alienate young Kleist from the institutional church. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all throughout his life Kleist stood in a totally negative relationship to Christianity. A final judgment as to his essential religious attitudes must await a systematic analysis of his later experience, as well as a study of his letters, dramas and Novellen.

Kleist's Military Background: Religion in the Prussian Officer Corps

Introduction

Another prominent element in Kleist's background and experience is his family's deep roots in the Prussian military tradition and his own service in the Prussian army from 1792 to 1799. Despite its obvious significance, this subject is not given extensive treatment in most critical works on Kleist.

It is commonly known that Heinrich von Kleist's father and grandfather were Prussian army officers, and that two of his relatives with literary interests, Ewald von Kleist and Franz Alexander von Kleist, preceded him in service in the Prussian officer

corps. Another relative, one General von Kleist, is also relatively well known by virtue of his singularly undistinguished service in the Prussian army during the time of the Napoleonic occupation.[74] These men, however, were only a few of a whole host of von Kleists who were members of the Prussian officer corps during the 18th-century. Between 1700 and 1806, for example, the Kleist family provided the Prussian army with no fewer than twelve generals, the greatest number supplied by any one Junker family.[75] During the time of Frederick the Great the Prussian army ranks contained some 116 members of the Kleist family, one half of whom were killed in the Silesian wars alone.[76] These figures give some idea of the extent to which many generations of the Kleist family were involved in the Prussian military heritage.[77] Thus when Heinrich von Kleist entered the officer corps he obviously was following a family tradition of long standing.

It is true, of course, that Heinrich von Kleist appears to

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[74]This General von Kleist attained his notoriety as a result of his ignoble surrender of the city of Magdeburg to French forces in 1806. When Heinrich von Kleist and his friend Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann were found wandering on the battlefield after the battle of Aspern in 1809 and were apprehended by Austrian troops as suspected French spies, the fact that Kleist's family name was identical to that of this General Kleist did not serve to ingratiate him to the suspicious Austrians. (See Maass, 272).

[75]Walter Görlitz, Die Junker: Adel und Bauer im deutschen Osten (Glücksburg/Ostsee: Verlag von C.A. Starke, 1956), 107.

[76]See Ernst von Barsewisch, Von Rossbach bis Freiberg, 1757-1763: Tagebuchblätter eines friderizianischen Fahnenjunkers und Offiziers, ed. Jürgen Olmes (Krefeld: Hermann Rühl Verlag, 1959), 251, note 62. Also Görlitz, 108.

[77]As late as 1914 there were 44 Kleists on active duty in the German army, and in the Second World War 17 members of the Kleist family were killed. See Görlitz, pp. 346 and 406.

repudiate this tradition by resigning his military commission in 1799. His reasons for leaving the army are contained in a letter addressed to his former teacher, Christian Ernst Martini,[78] He states in this lengthy letter, which was written immediately prior to his formal resignation, that he never has been fond of military life, and that gradually he has actually developed a strong aversion to it. While in the army he is, according to his own testimony, continually torn between his professional obligation to think and act as an officer, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his inner need to act as "Mensch." Furthermore, he considers it impossible that these two conflicting sets of duties can "bei dem jetzigen Zustande der Armeen" be harmonized. All in all, he feels that he simply is not suited for a military career, "weil er [der Soldatenstand] etwas durchaus Ungleichartiges mit meinem ganzen Wesen in sich trägt. . . ." He insists that he has wanted for some time already to abandon it, in order to be able to expend all of his energies in the pursuit of personal "Bildung." And now he has taken the decisive step, and has decided to resign his commission.

Despite the fact that Kleist chose to terminate his military career, however, it is obvious that he must have been well aware of the basic attitudes and prejudices of the Prussian officer caste in the 18th century--including its attitudes toward religion. Not only was he born into an old-line officer's family with a strong military tradition; he himself spent nearly seven years of his life in active military service. He may well have reacted negatively to

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[78]See Werke, II, pp. 472-486.

the Prussian military Weltschau, as the evidence seems to suggest, but it is almost inconceivable that he could have been totally unaffected by it. Of primary interest in this study is the question of whether or not Kleist's religious views in particular were to any significant extent conditioned by his exposure to this Weltschau, as he must have encountered it both at home and in the garrison.

A brief historical survey of the changing status of religion in the Prussian army in the 17th and 18th centuries will serve to help set the background for a discussion of the effect of Kleist's military background and experience on his religious development.

Religion and the Prussian Army-- Historical Background

The 17th Century

Soon after the beginning of his reign in 1640 Friedrich Wilhelm, "The Great Elector," took well-defined steps which were intended to promote the maintenance and growth of the Christian religion within the ranks of the Prussian army. In his "Articuls-Brieff eder Churfürstlich Brandenburgisch Kriegesrecht" of 1656 he specifically forbade the worship of any but the Christian God, and set heavy fines for cursing and for the desecration of divine services, the sacraments, or the Bible.[79] Military "Gottesdienst" was to be held twice daily, according to the articles of the "Kriegesrecht," and all military personnel were required to be present--"bei

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[79]See Erich Schild, Der Preussische Feldprediger (2 vols.; Vol.I, Halle: Verlag von Eugen Strien, 1888; Vol. II, Eisleben: Verlag von Otto Maehnert, 1890), II, pp. 2-3. Schild's work, to which frequent reference will be made in the following pages, is one among a very small number of works dealing with religion in the Prussian army of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Vermeidung der Strafe des Halseisens." Should a chaplain himself be absent from one of these services, or should he be intoxicated when he was to conduct such a "Gottesdienst," he too was subject to heavy fines.[80]

In 1670 Friedrich Wilhelm issued another directive, which stipulated that "Kirchenparade" be held every Sunday morning. At that time all of the Prussian troops were to be marched in strict military formation to and from worship services. On Sunday afternoons the individual soldier was allowed to attend the church of his choice, but he was expected to attend some service. Prayer services were, during the reign of the Great Elector, commonly held both before and after battle.[81] In fact, after the battle of Fehrbellin, later celebrated in Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg,[82] this same Friedrich Wilhelm apparently gave an official service of thanksgiving priority over pursuit of the routed foe.[83] His decree upon

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[80]See Schild, 3.

[81]See Schild, pp. 9, 21.

[82]Kleist's Prinz von Homburg too takes time to pray before the beginning of the battle:

> Ich--war in der Kapelle,
> Die aus des Dörfchens stillen Büschen blinkte.
> Man läutete, da wir vorüberzogen,
> Zur Andacht eben ein, da trieb michs an,
> Am Altar auch mich betend hinzuwerfen.

Kottwitz responds approvingly to this action of the Prince:

> Ein frommer junger Herr, das muss ich sagen!
> Das Werk, glaubt mir, das mit Gebet beginnt,
> Das wird mit Heil und Ruhm und Sieg sich krönen!

(Werke, I, p. 650, ll. 408-415).

[83]Kleist's "Kurfürst" too is to hold a service of thanksgiving for the victory, although not until the battle has been terminated:

> Der Sieg ist glänzend dieses Tages,
> Und vor dem Altar morgen dank ich Gott.

(Werke, I, p. 663, ll. 729-730).

that occasion reads in part as follows: "Ich lasse itzo predigen undt Gott dancken, undt nach gehaltener Dancksagung gehe Ich dem Feinde nach, welcher in höchster Konfusion ist."[84]

No decisive changes were made in the regulations pertaining to military religious observances in the years immediately following the termination of the Great Elector's reign. However, in 1701 the first Garnisonkirche was built in Berlin, and shortly thereafter it was decreed that Kirchenparade be held twice each Sunday, since too many troops were absenting themselves from Sunday afternoon services. Friedrich I continued during the time of his reign to supervise the chaplaincy very closely, just as his predecessors had done.

Frederick William I (1713-1740)

Friedrich Wilhelm I is termed a "royal bully" by Hans Rosenberg,[85] a "terrible, ludicrous, abominable man" by Pierre Gaxotte,[86] and a monarch "von einer aufrichtigen und einfachen Frömmigkeit" by Erich Schild.[87] Whatever his personal qualities and motivation may have been, it is clear that he had a particularly strong interest in the religious life of his beloved army. He supervised the military chaplaincy even more closely than his predecessors had; he went so far as to make specific recommendations

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[84]Schild, II, 21.

[85]Hans Rosenberg, Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 38.

[86]Pierre Gaxotte, Frederick the Great, trans. R. A. Bell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 6.

[87]Schild, II, 78.

as to subject matter for sermons, sermon organization, and the type of diction which his chaplains should use in conducting public worship. He forbade preaching which dealt with confessional differences and theological controversy, and limited the length of Sunday services to one hour--upon penalty of fine. In 1725 he decreed that his army officers personally had to lead their men to church twice each Sunday, and that armed guards were to be posted at the doorway of the church in order to prevent a premature exodus from divine worship.[88] One may doubt that the king's efforts had, as one of his admirers claimed, "die grosse Wirkung, dass die Religion in Ansehen stand und selbst von Generalen, Offizieren und gemeinen Soldaten geliebet und ausgeübet wurde,"[89] but there is no denying that Friedrich Wilhelm took his religion seriously and did his best to insure that his men complied with the regulations pertaining to their prescribed religious duties.

It is difficult to arrive at a reasonably accurate picture of the prevailing religious temper of the officer corps in the army of Frederick William I. Schild tends to oversimplify the situation, almost giving the impression that the officer corps consisted largely of devout Christians until 1763, the year which, in his opinion, marks the beginning of a general and rapid decline in the religious spirit of the army. It seems more realistic to suggest that the piety of Frederick William I was emulated by a sizeable number of his officers, although surely not by all of them. However, the king's Christianity was rather grim and iron-clad. It furnished him with a divine Task-

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[88]Schild, II, pp. 86, 100, 101.

[89]Schild, II, 79.

master, but did not serve to restrain him from the impressment of soldiers, cruel caprice in his dealings with soldiers and civilians alike, and brutality in matters of military discipline.

There apparently were more than a few members of the officer corps who had been educated in schools maintained by the Pietists.[90] These officers were by and large considerably more gentle and humane than their fellows, and did their best to temper the brutal treatment enlisted men commonly suffered at the hands of their officers.[91] The reception they were given by their fellow officers, however, is quite revealing. Generally speaking, the religious warmth and humaneness of the Pietist were resented by the typical army officer, who, if he was in any way religious, apparently found the rugged Christianity of the "Soldier-King" to be more adaptable to his rather harsh Prussian spirit.[92] Frederick William himself, while urging "Der alte Dessauer," one of his military commanders, to be more regular in church attendance, took pains to preface his admonitions with a disavowal of any personal connection with the Pietists.[93] The Prussian military machine apparently was not particularly receptive to the gentler strains of Pietism.

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[90]See Carl Hinrichs, "Der Hallische Pietismus als politisch-soziale Reformbewegung des 18. Jahrhunderts," Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands, Band II (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1953), 161.

[91]See Hinrichs, 188.

[92]See Otto Büsch, Militärsystem und Sozialleben im alten Preussen, Veröffentlichungen der Berliner historischen Kommission, Band 7 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1962), 44. Also Schild, II, 174.

[93]See Robert Ergang, The Potsdam Führer (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1941), 35.

Frederick the Great (1740-1786)

Although Frederick the Great certainly did not share his father's religious convictions, he did not immediately effect significant changes in regard to the prescribed forms of religious practice for the army. According to the "Infanterie-Reglement" issued in 1743, three years after his accession to the throne, "Betstunden" were still to be held twice daily, and all troops, officers included, were required to attend them.[94] "Kirchenparade" was, as during the reign of Frederick William I, to be held twice each Sunday, and both officers and enlisted men were required to take part in it.[95] Armed non-commissioned officers posted at the church door continued to serve as compelling reasons to remain in attendance at the entire service.[96]

While Frederick the Great's personal indifference in regard to Christianity doubtlessly eventually contributed to the decline of religion in the Prussian army, this decline did not become obvious until after the close of the Seven Years War. During the war itself there were still prominent evidences of the kind of piety observed in previous years in the army of Frederick William I. One Chaplain Wehrhan testified that during the Seven Years War "Gottesdienst und

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[94]Schild, II, 212.

[95]See Julius Langhäuser, Das Militärkirchenwesen im kurbrandenburgischen und Königlich Preussischen Heer: Seine Entwickelung und derzeitige Gestalt (Metz: Verlag von P. Müller, 1912), 56. Also Ulrich Bräker, Leben und Schriften Ulrich Bräkers, des armen Mannes im Tockenburg, ed. Samuel Voellmy (3 vols.; Basel: Verlag Birkhäuser, 1945), I, 195.

[96]Langhäuser, 56. Also Hans Helfritz, Geschichte der preussischen Heeresverwaltung (Berlin, Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1938), 210.

Betstunden waren immer im Gange und durften so wenig wie die Löhnungstage fehlen."[97] Ewald von Kleist noted that during this war it was customary for the soldiers to sing "geistliche Lieder . . . früh auf dem Marsche, ehe sie Lieder vom Könige von Preussen anstimmen. . . . Eines Morgens sangen sie eines, worin eine Stelle vorkam, dass Gott uns viel Gutes erweise. Dies rührte mich so, dass ich voraus ritt und viel weinte und die Hymne 'Gross ist der Herr' entwarf."[98] After the termination of the battle of Leuthen during this same war "Nun danket alle Gott" resounded across the snow-covered battlefield,[99] and thanksgiving services were customarily conducted following a Prussian victory. The diary of one Ernst von Barsewisch, a Prussian army officer during the Seven Years War, contains the following entry: "Am selbigen Tage erhielt Se. Königliche Hoheit der Prinz Heinrich noch die erfreuliche Nachricht von der Uebergabe der Stadt Schweidnitz und befahlen, dass den 15ten nachmittags um 2 Uhr von der ganzen Armee im Angesicht des Feindes Victoria geschossen und das Te deum laudamus gesungen werden sollte."[100]

However, soon after the termination of this war a new spirit seems to have supplanted the traditional piety previously in evidence. Schild ascribes this decline of piety in the army partly to the Enlightenment influences which were so prominent in all of life especially during the latter half of the century. "Die Gebildeten

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[97]Schild, II, 166.

[98]Schild, II, 166.

[99]See Curt Jany, Geschichte der Königlich Preussischen Armee bis zum Jahre 1807 (3 vols.; Berlin: Verlag von Karl Siegismund, 1929), II, 458.

[100]Barsewisch, 162.

jener Tage--der letzten Hälfte des vorigen Jahrhunderts--glaubten eben, auf Kirche und kirchliches Leben als auf eine angeblich niedere Entwicklungsstufe des menschlichen Geistes vornehm-mitleidig herabschauen zu können; ihr geistiges Leben wurde im Grossen und Ganzen durch die schöne Literatur beherrscht,"[101] he writes. He also suggests that the personal example set by the king had a deleterious effect on the religious life of the officers in particular. Some of the older officers retained the traditional piety of earlier years, but by and large the army was dominated by a new secular spirit.[102]

Uses of Religion in the Prussian Army of the 17th and 18th Centuries

Prior to the time of Frederick the Great, the concern shown by Prussian rulers for the religious life of their military personnel seems to have been prompted by a dual motivation. The Great Elector and Frederick William I were in their own way doubtlessly interested in the spiritual welfare of their subjects. However, they were also fully aware of the fact that God-fearing subjects would tend to be submissive and obedient soldiers. One look at the motley crew comprising their armies must have convinced them that extraordinary forces would have to be brought into play if a disciplined military unit were to be shaped from the available resources. An anonymous witness describes the situation early in the 18th century in these words:

> Eine Armee ist heutzutage, leider! fast nicht anders anzusehen, als eine Pfütze, darin alle Laster zusammenfliessen.

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[101]Schild, I, 24.

[102]Schild, I, 216.

> Da ist Raub, Mord, Unzucht, Meineid, Fluchen, Gotteslästern, Saufen, Schwelgen, Verachtung des göttlichen Wortes u. s. w. häufig anzutreffen. Das kommt denn vornehmlich daher, weil insgemein nur solche Leute Kriegsdienste annehmen, die entweder Eltern und Herren ungehorsam sind und nicht folgen wollen; oder die ein Bubenstück begangen haben und der Strafe der ordentlichen Obrigkeit entgehen wollen und alsdann in den Krieg als in eine Freistatt aller Schande und Laster laufen. . . .[103]

Another witness remarks that the Prussian army in 1714 "schien . . . einer Ablagerung sämmtlicher Vagabonden des Landes und einem Gefängnis ähnlicher zu werden, als einer Gesellschaft von Kriegern. . . ."[104] The cultivation of religion in the army thus was to serve a dual purpose in the eyes of the Prussian rulers: on the one hand, it was directed to the personal spiritual needs of the troops, and on the other hand, it was also utilized as an instrument for the moulding and disciplining of the unruly mob which was to serve the state as an army.

Not only was religion supposed to tame the wild spirits of the troops; it also was to serve as the foundation for soldierly virtues and as a stimulus to manly valour on the battlefield. The following lines taken from a sermon delivered by a military chaplain contain a theme common to the military sermonizing of the day: "Unser Leben kann nicht früher und nicht später endigen, als Gott will, und da zeigt es sich denn, wer ein braver Mann ist."[105] A military communion service too could be used to strengthen the courage and resolve of the fighting man. "Man forderte ferner sie [die Soldaten] auf, durch den Empfang des heiligen Abendmahls unter freiem Himmel sich zu verpflichten, auf dem eröffneten Kriegsschauplatze

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[103]Schild, I, 1. [104]Schild, I, 2.

[105]Schild, I, 136.

sich so zu verhalten, dass sie vor dem Richter aller Welt ein gnädiges Urteil erwarten könnten."[106] Sometimes the chaplain himself moved among the troops at the scene of combat, admonishing and encouraging them to do their best "für Gott und König." One Chaplain Küster, who served during the Seven Years War, ran unarmed among the beleaguered Prussian force at the battle of Hochkirch shouting "Kinder, thut Eure Pflicht! Gott wird uns helfen, der König wird bald mit Succurs kommen."[107] On into the time of Frederick the Great the army was spurred on by the reminder that God was its "höchster und treuester Alliirter,"[108] and that the combination of "Gott und der König" was an invincible one.[109]

As noted above, the personal attitudes of Frederick the Great toward Christianity differed radically from those of his royal ancestors. Frederick the Great, under whom Kleist's father served, considered all revealed religions, Christianity included, to be

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[106]Schild, I, 52. [107]Schild, I, 81.

[108]Schild, I, 74. A "viel gesungenes Soldatenlied" of the Seven Years War contains such a sentiment:

König Friedrich, Du musst siegen,
Weil Dein Gott stets mit Dir ist.
Wer sollte sich vor Dir nicht schmiegen,
Du kämpfest als ein Held und Christ.
Trotz dem Feind, der uns will schaden,
Unser Glück muss weiter gehn.

(Schild, I, 130).

[109]One suspects that sometimes the Prussians had a suspicion that they could also hold their own without divine aid--as long as that aid were not afforded the foe. "Der alte Dessauer," a military leader who served under both Frederick William I and Frederick the Great, is rumored to have prayed before a certain battle: "Und wenn Du uns nicht helfen willst, dann hilf auch den Kujonen drüben, den Feinden nicht" (Ulrich Mann, Lorbeer und Dornenkrone [Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, 1958], 104).

absurdities. Yet he was at the same time realistic enough to realize, in the words of Gaxotte, that "to attack established religions so as to found a natural religion would be an impracticable and foolish enterprise,"[110] even though he personally tended toward a rather chilly Deism. To a great extent, at least, he granted his subjects religious liberty; although he considered Protestantism to be the least harmful sect, he insisted that Catholics and Jews be allowed to live in peace as well.

Despite his personal contempt for Christianity, Frederick was not averse to using it in the interest of the state. He had no illusions about the essential goodness or perfectibility of man, and although he felt that religion by itself would not guarantee an adequate level of morality unless buttressed by "the fear of the gallows and public contempt,"[111] he did recognize its value in the establishment of discipline in both civilian and military life--but especially in the latter. Consequently he decreed in 1743, for example, that "weilen ein Bursche, der nicht Gott fürchtet, schwerlich seinem Herrn treu dienen und seinen Vorgesetzten rechten Gehorsam leisten wird, so sollen die Offiziers den Rekruten wohl einschärfen, eines christlichen und ehrbaren Wandels sich zu befleissigen; weshalb die Offiziers, wenn sie von eines Reuters gottlosem Leben erfahren, selbigen vermahnen und davon abzuhalten suchen müssen."[112] Further evidence of his purely pragmatic interest

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[110]Gaxotte, 288.

[111]George Gooch, Frederick the Great (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 278.

[112]Langhäuser, 46.

in Christianity is seen in a royal order forbidding chaplains to visit military Todeskandidaten, an order intended to intensify the severity of the death sentence.[113] Frederick obviously considered Christianity to be primarily an instrument for the promotion of military discipline, and not as a religion intended to meet basic human needs.

The personal religious convictions of Kleist's own father, who served as a Prussian army officer during the reign of Frederick the Great, cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy. Curt Hohoff suggests, as we have already seen, that the training young Heinrich von Kleist received at home "scheint starr, schematisch, lutherisch-orthodox und unpersönlich gewesen zu sein,"[114] but does not elucidate as to the basis of this assertion. If one may judge by the fact that young Kleist was baptized into the church and later attended its worship services, it would appear that his father was not among the Prussian officers who, following the lead of their king, totally rejected Christianity and the church. However, it is difficult to be more explicit as to the religion of the elder Kleist. It can be said that, as a member of the Prussian officer corps, he was exposed to a Christianity oriented to the needs of the Prussian state and army, a Christianity for the most part untouched by the tempering personal warmth of Pietism, which all throughout the century had been rejected in military circles. It is also well possible that in the Christianity he knew and apparently practiced,

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[113]See Langhäuser, 58. [114]Hohoff, 12.

theological dogmatism had been to a greater or lesser degree supplanted by the Enlightenment moralism, which has been described above.

Kleist's Experience in the Prussian Officer Corps--The Last Decade of the 18th Century

Heinrich von Kleist entered the army in 1792, six years after the death of Frederick the Great, and spent approximately seven years in Prussian military service. He was commissioned a lieutenant in 1797, before his twentieth birthday, and held that rank until his return to civilian life in 1799.

Although in his letter to Martini, Kleist does give various reasons for his decision to leave the army, nowhere does he give a detailed description of his early army years or his experience as a member of the officer corps. It is possible, however, to gain some idea of the general religious and intellectual tone dominant in the Prussian army in the last decade of the 18th century, since military histories and the biographies of some of Kleist's contemporaries do make reference to it.

The Prussian officer corps of the waning 18th century had, on the one hand, its old-line officers who continued to share many of the attitudes and prejudices of Frederick William I, the "Soldier-King." This group was by and large opposed to all military reform or innovation, and insisted that the old way of doing things was the best way. Many of the officers advocating this military conservatism had a grossly inadequate educational background and were themselves strongly anti-intellectual. This anti-intellectualism clearly dated back to Frederick William I, who in the early

decades of the century had despised scholars and had openly termed the learned fools.[115] In those days "a general was not regarded as uneducated, even though he could barely write his own name. Whoever could do more was styled a pedant, inksplasher and scribbler."[116]

Frederick the Great, on the other hand, esteemed learning highly, and sought to develop a well-trained and educated officer corps. He did succeed in training an elite group, but this group comprised only a small fraction of the total number of officers. By and large, according to Gordon Craig, the Prussian officer corps continued throughout the reign of Frederick the Great to be marked by "abysmal and arrogant ignorance," at least in the ranks below major.[117] This element in the officer corps continued to be of influence in the

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[115]Ergang, 28.

[116]Gordon Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 25.

[117]Craig, 26. It appears that even among the members of the Prussian general staff there were those whose basic educational background was inadequate. Hans Delbrück says of Field Marshall von Gneisenau, a contemporary of Kleist, that he was "später vielleicht Zeitweise der einzige von allen preussischen Generalen, der grammaticalisch und orthographisch richtig sprach und schrieb . . ." (Hans Delbrück, Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen Neidhardt von Gneisenau [2 vols., 2. Auflage; Berlin: Hermann Walther Verlag, 1894], I, 31). Field Marshall York was among those officers troubled by the niceties of grammar. Of the "mirs und michs," which apparently gave him exceptional difficulty, he stated: "Beim Schreiben geht es noch, da macht man einen Zug, und jeder kann es lesen, wie er will; aber beim Sprechen muss man heraus damit" (Johann Droysen, Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen York von Wartenburg [3 vols., 2. Auflage; Berlin: Verlag von Veit und Comp., 1851], I, 10).

[118]See Craig, 44. Also Georg Liebe, Der Soldat in der deutschen Vergangenheit ("Monographien zur deutschen Kulturgeschichte"; Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1899), 155.

1790's, the time of Kleist's military service, and even beyond the turn of the century.[118]

However, especially among the younger officers a new spirit was evident in the 1790's. Not only did the officer corps have its conservative, anti-intellectual group; it also had "eine Klasse von gelehrten und mehrenteils sehr geistreichen Offizieren"[119]--men interested not only in military science but also in natural science, and sometimes even the humanities and the fine arts. Field Marshall von Gneisenau was, according to his biographer, a serious student of foreign languages, wrote poetry, directed an amateur theatre, and cultivated an interest in music and the graphic arts.[120] Field Marshall von Boyen too wrote occasional poetry and attended Kant's lectures on anthropology, as well as lectures in physics, history and statistics.[121] These tendencies and interests were derided by members of the more conservative group, such as Field Marshall York. "York ergoss sich in Spott über die ästhetischen Officiere," according to his biographer, Johann Droysen, "und gefiel sich darin, sich den 'gelehrten' Officieren gegenüber als den blossen Praktiker und Autodidakten, als Soldaten nach dem natürlichen, gesunden Menschenverstand zu bezeichnen."[122]

Kleist's interests mark him as a member of the new class of officers which rejected the traditional prejudices and attitudes of

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[119]Jany, III, 428. [120]Delbrück, I, pp. 31-32.

[121]Hermann von Boyen, Generalfeldmarschall Hermann von Boyen: Denkwürdigkeiten und Erinnerungen, 1771-1813 (2 vols,; Stuttgart: Verlag von Robert Lutz, 1899), I, 18.

[122]Droysen, I, 120.

the Prussian officer corps. He was an excellent clarinettist and a member of a string quartet which in 1797 made a walking tour of the Harz region, earning its keep by giving impromptu concerts along the way. He also shared the intellectual interests of the young progressives and their concern for Bildung. In his letter to Martini dated March 19, 1799, he states that during his stay in Potsdam he has been "mehr Student als Soldat," and has studied mathematics, philosphy, Greek and Latin.[123] His two closest young officer friends, Ernst von Pfuel, later "Ministerpräsident von Preussen," and Otto Rühle von Lilienstern, later Inspector General of the Prussian "Militär-Bildungswesen," shared both his musical and intellectual interests.[124]

His contacts with old-line Prussian officers were probably less rewarding and enjoyable than his association with men like von Pfuel and Lilienstern. Hermann von Boyen, one of Kleist's contemporaries, mentions in his Erinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten that he was often "peinlich berührt" by the coarse harshness of many older officers.[125] Kleist no doubt had similar experiences; his own regimental commander, General von Rüchel, for example, was a member of the old school and was, in Maass' terms, an "Erzgrobian."[126] Kleist's place in the Prussian officer corps--if indeed he had a place there at all--was among the younger progressive element. He obviously could share neither the anti-intellectual prejudices nor the military ideals of the older officers.[127]

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[123] Werke, II, 479.

[124] See Maass, 17.

[125] von Boyen, I, 16.

[126] Maass, 15.

[127] See Werke, II, 479.

As one would expect, it was precisely this younger element among the officers which had been most affected by the thought of the Enlightenment, its religious thought included, since the younger generation had been educated in the Enlightenment tradition and continued to read the literature of the time. There were in the Prussian officer corps in 1792, according to the testimony of Chaplain Wehrhan, "wahrhaft fromme Männer, die sich durch den unchristlichen Zeitgeist ihren frommen Christenglauben nicht rauben liessen. Aber solche Männer gehörten doch zu den Ausnahmen. Im Allgemeinen war bei dem damaligen Officiercorps ein trauriger Niedergang religiösen Sinnes und Lebens vorhanden. . . ."[128] In the army of Frederick the Great it had been the older officers who had insisted that "das Unglück der Schlachten rührt von der abnehmenden Religion in der Armee her, . . ."[129] and that it was vital to the welfare of the army that Christianity be furthered in its ranks. As the older officers gradually died out, the traditional piety of orthodox Christianity became an increasingly less vital force in army life. The younger, educated officers tended to regard it as an anachronism--acceptable in the unlettered and uncouth world of Frederick William I, perhaps, but an absurdity a half-century later, after the rays of Enlightenment had dispelled the dark clouds of superstition. Even the majority of the older officers, though largely untouched by the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment, had gradually come to regard religion as superfluous.[130] Thus the

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[128]Schild, I, 222. [129]Schild, I, 217.

[130]See Schild, I, pp. 222-224.

religious tone in the Prussian army had changed significantly in the latter half of the 18th century.

It is difficult to give an accurate assessment of the role of Kleist's military experience in his religious development. It is clear that the older piety which had issued in the spontaneous mass singing of geistliche Lieder upon the conclusion of a battle was, generally speaking, a thing of the past by 1790. As was the case in civilian life, new religious ideals gradually replaced the older ones. Military cadets were now to be trained in good Enlightenment fashion so as to become "eifrige Anbeter der T u g e n d,"[131] and an Officier-Lesebuch written in the 1790's was designed to encourage an "aufgeklärte moralische Religiosität"[132] among the army officers.

It does not appear, however, that Kleist's military experience resulted in a radical religious transformation on his part. The letter he wrote to Martini immediately prior to his resignation from the army[133] does make liberal use of Enlightenment moralistic religious concepts, but Kleist had no doubt come into contact with Enlightenment thought before his military service. Martini himself had been trained in the Enlightenment tradition,[134] and the education

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[131]Jupp Hoven, Der preussische Offizier des 18. Jahrhunderts (Zeulenroda: Bernhard Sporn Verlag, 1936), 81.

[132]Hoven, 89.

[133]Werke, II, p. 472ff.

[134]See Groeper, 14.

Kleist received under his guidance was in all probability oriented to the ideals and prejudices of the Aufkl#rung.

However, as he matured, his associations with the younger Prussian officers, many of whom shared his interests and had been educated in this same Enlightenment tradition, may well have reinforced his aufgekl#rte religious ideas. His studies in Potsdam probably had the same effect on him. The sum total of Kleist's experience during the years 1792 to 1799 probably served to strengthen and further develop the religious disposition which had already taken root prior to his entry into military service--a disposition generally oriented to the religious ideals of the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER III

KLEIST AND THE SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH

Introduction

In view of the extraordinary diversity of critical opinion which marks the Kleist scholarship of the last 100 years, it is not at all surprising to discover that there is little agreement as to the nature and importance of Kleist's religious orientation. Some critics scarcely mention this aspect of Kleist's thought and experience, apparently considering it to be of no more than peripheral significance. Joachim Maass, as noted above, curtly terms Kleist "ein heidnischer Mensch" who was "im Grunde seines Herzens . . . ein Nihilist,"[1] without providing a reasoned and documented defense of his position. Similarly, neither Adolf Wilbrandt, one of the earliest of Kleist's biographers, nor such later scholars as Friedrich Gundolf or Philipp Witkop lay appreciable stress on his religious development.

On the other hand, Friedrich Braig, Gerhard Fricke and Günter Blöcker are among those who view an understanding of Kleist's religion as central, even indispensable, to an adequate understanding of his thought and creative works. As was noted above, Braig claims to see as the key to an understanding of Kleist's life and

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[1]Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens (Wien: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1957), pp. 36, 384.

writing his alleged struggle with and toward the truths of the Christian religion as taught specifically by the Roman Catholic Church. Although Gerhard Fricke obviously does not share Braig's view of the alleged confessional-ecclesiastical tendency of Kleist's quest, he does agree that the quest itself is religious in essence. Fricke emphasizes that "Gefühl," the "Hieroglyphe des Kleistschen Wesens," is "ein metapsychologischer, religiöser Vorgang," in which "der geheimnisvolle Weg zum Ewigen" is opened.[2] A third prominent critic who is convinced of the religious nature of Kleist's search is Günter Blöcker: "Von der 'borniert-religiösen Grundlage seiner fundamentalen Fragestellung' her, wie Georg Lukacs, der marxistische Literaturdogmatiker, es ärgerlich genannt hat, erklärt sich sowohl der unbedingte als auch der mystische Zug in Kleist. . . ."[3] Blöcker, like Fricke, detects in Kleist's life and writing the discovery of the "Gottesunmittelbarkeit des menschlichen Gefühls," which issues in a new, existential "Weltfrömmigkeit."[4]

Even among critics who do acknowledge the general significance of Kleist's religious orientation there is little unanimity regarding particulars. Briefly consider, for example, the various evaluations of the pantheistic elements found in the makeup of the God Jupiter who appears in Kleist's Amphitryon. Franz Servaes lays heavy stress on the pantheistic strain in Jupiter's character, and goes so far as to identify Jupiter's pantheistic statements with Kleist's

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[2]Gerhard Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1929), pp. 29, 31.

[3]Günter Blöcker, Heinrich von Kleist oder das absolute Ich (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1960), 63.

[4]Blöcker, pp. 170, 93.

own religious convictions. "Und in Versen, die an Goethe gemahnen," he writes, "offenbart Kleist durch den Mund des Gottes seine pantheistische Religion."[5] Otto Brahm, on the other hand, while agreeing that Kleist is expressing personal religious belief in some of Jupiter's statements, does not give prominence to this element in Kleist's religion. He instead suggests that this pantheistic strain may well be little more than a remnant of his earlier associations with Christian Ernst Wünsch,[6] since nowhere in his later works is there evidence of this Pantheism.[7]

Gerhard Fricke too sees pantheistic elements in Jupiter, but emphasizes that Jupiter is not a unified dramatic or religious figure, since he embodies Greek mythological and Christian elements along with his Pantheism.[8] Fricke makes no claim to perceive in Jupiter's pronouncements evidences of Kleist's personal religious convictions. Walter Silz also plays down the significance of these pantheistic strains in Jupiter. "It is apparent that we must regard the occasional injection of pantheism as inorganic, that we must interpret Jupiter, not in the light of these sporadic passages, but as he appears and behaves in the play,"[9] he writes. Rudolf Ibel goes so far as to suggest that Amphitryon gives clear evidence of

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[5]Franz Servaes, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: Verlag von E.A. Seemann und der Gesellschaft für graphische Industrie, 1902), 69.

[6]See Chapter II, pp. 45-46 of this dissertation.

[7]Otto Brahm, Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist (Neue Ausgabe; Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911), 167.

[8]Fricke, 78.

[9]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist's Conception of the Tragic (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 34.

Kleist's rejection of Pantheism.[10] Friedrich Braig, as a final example, proceeds along entirely different lines. He suggests that to emphasize the pantheistic strain in the figure of Jupiter will result in a complete misapprehension of "das innerste Leben dieser Dichtung." Braig chooses to stress instead the rationalistic element in Jupiter: "Dieser Gott ist noch der des Rationalismus und er kommt aus seinem Verstandeskerker nicht heraus. . . ."[11]

This relatively restricted area of disagreement is symptomatic of the general state of affairs in Kleist scholarship. There appears to be no issue of any importance at all--including the nature of Kleist's religion--concerning which there is a general concensus of critical opinion.

Reasons for this confusing variety in interpretation and emphasis are perhaps near at hand. In the first place, some of Kleist's critics approach his works from a clearly articulated religious-philosophical perspective which obviously colors their vision to a significant extent. More seriously, at times these scholars are not content merely to read the poet from this perspective, but are also determined to find in the poet himself this same perspective. Given this tendency, it is not at all surprising that they read Kleist's message differently.

Friedrich Braig, who forces a Roman Catholic theological framework on Kleist's works, is generally recognized as the most

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[10]Rudolf Ibel, Heinrich von Kleist--Schicksal und Botschaft (Hamburg: Holsten-Verlag, 1961), 72.

[11]Friedrich Braig, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925), 212.

notorious offender in this respect.[12] Heinz Demisch, however, approaches Kleist from an even less likely perspective, namely that of anthroposophy. Demisch never tires of pointing out, among other things, "wie stark Mars-Wirkungen in das Leben von Kleist hineingespielt haben und wie überaus häufig er in seinen Werken Mars-Situationen schildert."[13] And Demisch, as do all the other Kleist critics and biographers, staunchly claims for himself scholarly objectivity:

> Dieses Walten einer ausgeprägten Mars-Stimmung über der Erscheinung Heinrich von Kleists ist uns aus den Tatsachen unmittelbar entgegengetreten. Wir waren weder von einer vorgefassten Meinung ausgegangen, noch hatten wir jemals deswegen etwa ein Horoskop befragt.[14]

Nor does Günter Blöcker in his sensitive study of Kleist conceal his own existentialist philosophical orientation, which provides the perspective from which he reads and interprets Kleist. Unger notes that Friedrich Braig's Heinrich von Kleist contains "ein persönliches Bekenntnis des Verfassers." The same thing is true of Blöcker's work, although his Weltschau is woven perhaps somewhat more subtly into the texture of his book than Braig's is.[15] Furthermore, Blöcker's personal orientation probably corresponds more

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[12]See Chapter I, p. 8 of this dissertation.

[13]Heinz Demisch, Heinrich von Kleist: Schicksal im Zeichen der Bewusstseinseele (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1964), 136.

[14]Demisch, 136.

[15]Blöcker, like Braig, moralizes unabashedly, although the content of his moralizing naturally differs radically from that of Braig. See, for example, his extended discourse on modern man's predicament (pp. 130-131), his assertion that there is no answer to the tragic question of the meaning of life (p. 131), and his affirmation of the "positive nihilism" which he sees as a stamp of 20th-century literature (p. 21).

closely to that of Kleist than does Braig's Christian world-view. But the point to be made here is simply that a significant measure of the lack of unanimity among Kleist scholars can be traced directly to the wide range of perspectives from which these scholars interpret Kleist and his work.

It must be conceded, however, that there is a certain enigmatic quality about Kleist's works themselves which invites a wide variety of interpretations--also in regard to his religious orientation. One aspect of this enigma involves the difficulty of knowing in any one of Kleist's dramas or Novellen which figure, if any, speaks for Kleist, and which, if any, of the judgments apparently made in the course of the work are those of the poet himself.

It may be, as Bernt von Heiseler flatly states, that "Kleist hat keine Figuren, die als Sprecher für ihn stehn."[16] There remains the larger question, however, of whether Kleist is simply an objective narrator of a work like Michael Kohlhaas, for example, or whether he as author incorporates personal judgments in the work itself. In the specific case of Kohlhaas, which will be of particular interest in this study of Kleist's religion, critical opinion differs widely as to the extent to which Kleist identifies with his central figure. Wilhelm Herzog suggests that the poet in this Novelle is basically impartial, that Kleist, "obschon er eine heimliche Vorliebe für seinen angeklagten Helden hegt, ist der unparteiische Richter, der ihn zum Tode verurteilt."[17]

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[16]Bernt von Heiseler, Kleist (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1939), 25.

[17]Wilhelm Herzog, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), 336.

Other critics, however, feel that they can clearly detect Kleist's personal attitudes toward the figure of Kohlhaas in this work, although there is relatively little agreement as to the substance of these attitudes. Erich Hofacker, for example, sees Kleist's attitude toward Kohlhaas to be initially one of condemnation, but as the story progresses, the poet's condemnation, Hofacker feels, is replaced by approbation.[18] Blöcker seeks to distinguish between the judgment of the narrator-chronicler of the Novelle, a judgment which is in large part negative in tone, and that of Kleist, which, he feels, becomes increasingly positive.[19] J. M. Lindsay takes a radically different position and identifies the poet totally with Kohlhaas, whom "he is eager only to justify."[20] Lindsay goes so far as to term the figure of Kohlhaas "an almost satanic piece of self-dramatization," "Kleist's projection of himself."[21] Thus it is no simple matter to attempt to distill from Kleist's works his personal religious attitudes, since one must listen long and carefully in order to distinguish which of the currents flowing through a given work is expressive of the poet's personal attitudes, and even then one can never be sure.

One might expect that Kleist's letters, as relatively forthright personal documents, would shed a good deal of light on the question of his religious orientation. However, even a cursory

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[18]Erich Hofacker, "Bergengruen's 'Das Feuerzeichen' and Kleist's 'Michael Kohlhaas,'" Monatshefte (Madison), XLVII (1955),356.

[19]Blöcker, 213.

[20]J. M. Lindsay, "Kohlhaas and K: Two Men in Search of Justice," German Life and Letters, XIII, N.S. (1959-60), 193.

[21]Lindsay, 193.

examination of the letters reveals that nearly two-thirds of them date from the years 1799-1802, prior to the period of his full maturity and artistic activity, and hence are of limited significance in a study of the religious orientation of the mature poet. Furthermore, the letters which Kleist wrote after 1802 simply do not contain extensive comment on his religion or, for that matter, on his literary works themselves. In short, although the letters furnish a certain amount of valuable information as to Kleist's earlier religious development in particular, it appears that the search for an understanding of his mature religious views must of necessity be focussed in large part on his creative works themselves.

The Sources of Religious Truth and the Knowledge of God

Orthodox Christianity

The rhetorical questions addressed to Job by Zophar the Naamathite, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection?"[22] express a sentiment which has been echoed by believers of every age, namely that God is the incomprehensible One, whom man cannot know as He is in the hidden depths of His divine essence. In the same breath, however, the orthodox Christian has always insisted that it is possible for man to know God in a measure which is quite adequate for his personal needs. This knowledge, the Christian maintains, is possible only because God in His infinite goodness has chosen to communicate knowledge of Himself to man, to reveal Himself.

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[22]Job 11:7.

The reformers generally distinguished between two modes of God's self-revelation. The first has been commonly termed "general revelation," which John Calvin succintly defines as God's "manifestation of himself in the exquisite structure of the world."[23] However, due to the intrusion of sin into the creation, man is unable to derive from this general revelation adequate knowledge of God. "Vain, therefore, is the light afforded us in the formation of the world to illustrate the glory of its Author, which, though its rays be diffused all around us, is insufficient to conduct us into the right way,"[24] writes Calvin.

Thus there is a second mode of revelation, "special revelation," God's direct self-communication, which assumed, through the inspiration of the Spirit, permanent form in the Holy Scriptures. Scripture becomes, in other words, God's continuing revelation to man. "The Scripture," says Calvin, "collecting in our minds the otherwise confused notions of Deity, dispels the darkness, and gives us a clear view of the true God."[25] And again, "the Scripture discovers God to us as the Creator of the world, and declares what sentiments we should form of him, that we may not be seeking after a deity in a labyrinth of uncertainty."[26] Luther often expresses similar sentiments: "Weiter sagen wir," he writes, "dass wir Christen nicht genug daran haben, wie der Schöpfer zu rechnen und zu halten sei

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[23]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen (2 vols.; 7th American edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), I, 83.

[24]Calvin, I, 77.

[25]Calvin, I, 80.

[26]Calvin, I, 81.

gegen der Creatur; sondern wir wissen und lehren aus der Schrift, was Gott in sich selber ist, dass er sein göttlich Wesen bei sich selber hat."[27]

Furthermore, both Luther and Calvin are explicit in pointing out that the Scriptures provide the one indispensable basis for valid knowledge of God and His way. Thus Luther writes in customary forceful fashion:

> Denn es ist beschlossen, Gott will ungesehen, unerkannt, unbegriffen sein, ohne allein durch sein Wort. Darum ist's umsonst, was man vornimmt zur Seligkeit, ausser seinem Wort. . . . Darum lass dir sein Buch, darin er mit dir redet, befohlen sein. Denn er hat's nicht umsonst lassen schreiben, dass man's da soll lassen liegen, als redete er mit den Mäusen unter der Bank, oder mit den Fliegen auf dem Pulpet.[28]

Calvin too insists that "no man can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine, without having been a disciple of the Scripture."[29]

In summary, orthodox Christianity, while recognizing the ultimate incomprehensibility of God, the Infinite One, has always insisted that man can, by virtue of His self-revelation in the creation and particularly in His Word, know Him "as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation."[30] Although God's ways often remain past finding out, it is the conviction

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[27]Martin Luther, Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften, ed. Johann Georg Walch (Neue revidirte Stereotypausgabe; St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1904), VII, column 2154.

[28]Luther, IX, column 1820.

[29]Calvin, I, 82.

[30]Quoted from the "Belgic Confession," a sixteenth-century doctrinal statement written for the Protestant churches in the Low Countries, as contained in Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (3 vols., 4th edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), III, 384.

of the Christian that the Scriptures furnish a firm base on which he can, through the illumination of the Spirit of God,[31] ground his life.

Heinrich von Kleist

The Nature of Kleist's Religious Concern

To undertake a discussion of Kleist's concept of the source of religious truth and knowledge of God is to assume that he was, at one time or another, concerned specifically with religious truth and questions pertaining to the nature and existence of God. But is this assumption warranted?

Most critics reject the assertion of August Sauer that Kleist tended strongly toward Catholic mysticism in the period immediately preceding his death.[32] Similarly, Friedrich Braig's contention that "zwischen den beiden Zentralgedanken des Christentums, von der Erbsünde und von der Erlösung, ist notwendig auch der Ideengang der Novellenreihe wie der Dramenreihe ausgespannt,"[33] has failed to win any substantial acceptance in the Kleist scholarship of the past thirty-five years. The efforts of Sauer and Braig clearly

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[31]Calvin was particularly wary of those who neglected the Scriptures in favor of supposed direct communications from God's Spirit. "A very different sobriety becomes the children of God; who, while they are sensible that, exclusively of the Spirit of God, they are utterly destitute of the light of truth, yet are not ignorant that the word is the instrument, by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of his Spirit" (Calvin, I, 108).

[32]See Chapter I, p. 2 of this dissertation.

[33]Braig, 432.

represent one extreme--namely, an attempt to place Kleist within the sphere of positive influence of Christianity as incorporated in Roman Catholicism.

On the other hand, Joachim Maass' thesis represents the opposite pole in the total body of critical opinion. Maass suggests that Kleist had neither a theological nor basically religious concern, in the conventional sense of the term, and terms him a nihilist.[34] But again, this view of the poet's basic orientation appears to find no more acceptance than do the theses of Sauer and Braig.

Kleist scholars have tended, by and large, to posit as one aspect of Kleist's basic Weltschau belief in the existence of God. Ernst Kayka, writing in 1906, sees as one of the essentials of Kleist's religion the belief in a living God who is the ground of all being.[35] Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer states in 1922 in her analysis of Kleist's religion that "es gibt keine Äusserung Kleists, die auch nur auf einen Zweifel an der Existenz Gottes hinwiese."[36] Later critics have made similar statements. Walter Silz, in his latest work on Kleist, published in 1961, writes: "Kleist seems never to have doubted the existence of a Supreme Being. . . "[37]; and Heinz

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[34]See Maass, pp. 36, 324, 384.

[35]Ernst Kayka, Kleist und die Romantik (Berlin: A. Duncker, 1906), 135.

[36]Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, "Heinrich von Kleist, Religiosität und Charakter," Jahrbuch der Kleist-Gesellschaft, III and IV, 1923-24 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1925), 33.

[37]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 27.

Ide, writing at approximately the same time, insists that "unangerührt von allen Fragwürdigkeiten der 'wandelbaren Welt' bleibt sein ihm vom Gefühl versichertes Wissen, dass Transzendenz sei."[38]

Kleist's letters and other early writings in particular do indeed make specific reference to the Deity. In his "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden . . ." he makes direct reference to "Gott";[39] often in his earlier years, however, he uses some other term to signify the Deity. The terms he uses in these early documents, which originate between the years 1797 and 1806, tend to be relatively abstract and impersonal in nature. For example, he makes repeated reference to "der Himmel" and "die Gottheit," and also refers to "der Wille, der über uns waltet" and to the "Geist, der an der Spitze der Welt steht."[40] In one of the very last letters he wrote, on the other hand, Kleist speaks somewhat more personally of the "Gott"[41] to whom he can now, for the first time, pray, and expresses to Marie von Kleist the wish: "Möchte Dich Gott bald abrufen in jene bessere Welt. . . ."[42] The possible significance of this variety in terminology used to signify God will be discussed later.

Even where critics have hesitated to ascribe direct theological convictions or tenets to Kleist, they have in large

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[38]Heinz Ide, Der junge Kleist (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1961), 231.

[39]Werke, II, 302.

[40]See, for example, Werke, II, pp. 301, 302, 477, 509, 511, 574, 586, 617, 646, 670, 683, 684, 768.

[41]Werke, II, 887.

[42]Werke, II, 888.

measure seen his ultimate concern, in all the phases of his life and creativity, to be basically a religious concern. Fricke and Blöcker, as has been shown, are among those who stress this religious concern.[43] Heinz Ide, writing by his own admission in the Frickean tradition of Kleist scholarship, emphasizes the fact that the struggles of the younger Kleist assume their urgency by virtue of their religious nature and implications.[44] And Bernt von Heiseler sees as imperative for the young Kleist insight into the "göttlicher Sinn"[45] of each of life's experiences and undertakings.

Kleist himself saw the course of his pre-Kantian years, at least, as determined by his religion. In the famous letter of March 22, 1801, in which he tells Wilhelmine of his Kantkrise, he also outlines the contours of the religion which had been his prior to his encounter with Kant.[46] He describes what had been the "Heiligkeit" of "Wahrheit und Bildung" within the framework of the religion which now lay shattered, and cries out in anguish: "Mein einziges, mein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, und ich habe nun keines mehr--."[47] In other words, it obviously was not an abstract intellectual scheme which was destroyed through Kant, but Kleist's religion, a religion on whose basis he had sought to order all of his thought and activity. And although this particular religion was eventually replaced by what might be termed a religion of another stamp, the fact remains that Kleist did, at least in his youth, view

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[43]See pp. 99-100 of this dissertation.

[44]Ide, 116. [45]von Heiseler, 13.

[46]See Werke, II, 633. The passage under consideration is also quoted on p. 121 of this chapter.

[47]Werke, II, 634.

his ultimate concern as a "Religion."

Given, then, his repeated reference to God and the avowedly religious nature of his youthful striving, one is confronted with the problem of identifying what for Kleist constituted the source of religious authority and the knowledge of God. For the Reformers and the orthodox Christians in the Reformation tradition, the Bible was the indispensable fount of religious truth. But is there any evidence that Kleist knew the Bible in more than a general way? And if so, did he consider it to be in any sense normative for his religious practice and the development of his concept of God?

Kleist's Knowledge of the Bible

It is clear that Kleist must have known the Bible, judging by his use of biblical language and even of biblical materials and themes. Hanna Hellmann, in a convincing article entitled "Kleists 'Hermannsschlacht' und 'Das erste Buch Samuelis,'"[48] traces at some length a number of striking correspondences between Kleist's drama and the Old Testament book of Samuel. Not only, she maintains, did he use specific incidents from this biblical book in the construction of his drama; he also attempted to emulate in the Hermannsschlacht the feeling of religious passion which characterized Israel in its fight for freedom as recorded in this book of Samuel, in an effort to stimulate the oppressed Germans to throw off their own yoke of tyranny.[49] She finds that Kleist also used another Old Testament

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[48]Hanna Hellmann, "Kleists 'Hermannsschlacht' und 'Das erste Buch Samuelis,'" Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde, XXXVIII (1924), 99.

[49]Hellmann, 100.

book, the book of Judges; from the accounts contained in this book, we are told, he was no doubt provided with the germ of the so-called "Hally scene" in the Hermannsschlacht.[50]

Die Hermannsschlacht, however, is not the only one of Kleist's works which reveals its author's acquaintance with Scripture. Several critics rightly hear clear echoes of the Annunciation in Jupiter's promise near the end of Amphitryon to present Alkmene and Amphitryon with a son: "'Dir wird ein Sohn geboren werden, dess Name Herkules'--selbst der Wortlaut ist der Verkündigung Jesu angepasst" writes Otto Brahm.[51] And the lines spoken by Sosias:

> Wer den Vögeln
> Im Himmel Speisung reicht, wird auch, so denk ich,
> Den alten ehrlichen Sosias speisen[52]

carry strong overtones of the biblical "sehet die Vögel unter dem Himmel an . . . euer himmlischer Vater nährt sie doch.[53]

It is not difficult at all to cite from Kleist's works many lines which convey biblical tones. Among those which most readily come to mind are the following:

a) Der Hirsch, der von der Mittagsglut gequält,
Den Grund zerwühlt, mit spitzigem Geweih,
Er sehnt sich so begierig nicht,
Vom Felsen in den Waldstrom sich zu stürzen,

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[50]Hellmann, 103. Curt Hohoff too traces the "Hally scene" to the book of Judges. (See Curt Hohoff, Heinrich von Kleist in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten ["Rowohlts Monographien;" Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1958], 98). In this scene Hally, a German girl who has been raped by Roman soldiers, is killed by her own father. Hermann subsequently orders that her body be dismembered and that its parts be sent to various areas throughout the land.

[51]Otto Brahm, Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist (Neue Ausgabe; Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911), 168. See also Herzog, 323.

[52]Werke, I, p. 310, ll. 2041-43. [53]Matt. 6:26.

Den Reissenden, als ich, jetzt, da du mein bist,
In alle deine jungen Reize mich.
(Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, in Werke, I, 527, ll. 2589-94.)

Wie der Hirsch schreit nach frischem Wasser, so schreit meine Seele, Gott, zu dir. Meine Seele dürstet nach Gott. . . .
(Psalm 42:2-3.)

b) Weh mir! Mein Geist, von Wunderlicht geblendet,
Schwankt an des Wahnsinns grausem Hang umher.
(Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, 509, ll. 2159-60.)

Und da er auf dem Wege war und nahe an Damaskus kam, umleuchtete ihn plötzlich ein Licht vom Himmel; und er fiel auf die Erde. . . . und als er seine Augen auftat, sah er niemand.
(Acts 9:3,4,8.)

c) Da liegt sie mir . . . entschlummert zu Füssen. . . .
(Das Käthchen von Heilbronn 437, l. 250ff.)

Und sie schlief bis zum Morgen zu seinen Füssen.
(Ruth 3:14.)

d) Seit jenem Tage folgt sie ihm nun . . . geführt am Strahl seines Angesichts. . . .
(Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, 436, l. 212ff.)

Sie werden im Licht deines Antlitzes wandeln.
(Psalm 89:16.)

e) Ach, Meine Seel ist matt bis in den Tod!
(Penthesilea, in Werke, I, 363, l. 1237.)

Da sie ihn aber drängte mit ihren Worten alle Tage und ihn zerplagte, ward seine Seele matt bis an den Tod.
(Judges 16:16.)

f) Du unternimmst, Kurzsichtge, ihn zu meistern,
Ihn, der der Menschen Herzen kennt?
(Amphitryon, in Werke, I, 288, ll. 1372-73.)

. . . Denn du allein kennst das Herz aller Kinder der Menschen.
(I Kings 8:39.)

g) Mein Sohn! Mein Sohn! Ermordet!
Zu meinem Sohne lasst mich, meinem Sohne!
(Die Familie Schroffenstein, in Werke, I, 147, ll. 2611-12.)

Mein Sohn Absalom! Mein Sohn, mein Sohn Absalom!
Wollte Gott, ich wäre für dich gestorben! O Absalom,
mein Sohn, mein Sohn.
(II Samuel 18:33.)

h) Ihr werdet sie, bekränzt mit Blumen nicht,
Bei der Posaunen und der Zimbeln Klang,
Zu euren duftgen Heimatstälern führen.
(Penthesilea, 345, ll. 695-97.)

Lobet ihn mit Posaunen. . . . Lobet ihn mit hellen
Zimbeln; lobet ihn mit wohlklingenden Zimbeln!
(Psalm 150:3,5.)

One might further cite as evidence of Kleist's knowledge of the Bible the clear echoes of the book of Revelation which are found in Michael Kohlhaas. In this Novelle Kohlhaas sets out initially with seven servants[54] (cf. the seven angels of Revelation 16), terms himself the "Statthalter Michaels" (II, 41), (cf. Revelation 12), is bent upon establishing a new order of things (II, 41), (cf. Revelation 21:1), is himself termed a dragon (II, 37), (cf. Revelation 12:7), and is accompanied by twelve "Knechte" (II, 44), (cf. Revelation 21:12ff).

And finally, at least three times in his letters Kleist makes an explicit appeal to the Bible for illustration or substantiation of a point he is trying to establish. In a letter to his sister Ulrike dated May, 1799, he writes: "Denn schon die Bibel sagt, willst du das Himmelreich erwerben, so lege selbst Hand an" (II, 489). In a letter to Wilhelmine written in December of 1801 he states: "Sind nicht fast alle Töchter in demselben Falle, und folgen sie

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[54] Werke, II, 31. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, volume and page references to Kleist's Werke will be made in parentheses.

nicht doch, so schwer es ihnen auch scheint, dem weisen Spruche aus der Bibel: Du sollst Vater und Mutter verlassen und Deinem Manne anhangen?" (II, 705). And some five weeks later in another letter to Ulrike: "In der Bibel steht, arbeite so wird es Dir wohl gehen. . . ." (II, 713).

The precise nature of Kleist's knowledge of the Bible cannot, of course, be fixed with certainty. Nor can one determine the years during which he was exposed to the Bible. Although very little is known about the religious tone in the home into which he was born,[55] it is well possible that as a small boy he was introduced to the Scriptures in his own home. It is also possible that Kleist had pre-confirmation religious training which probably involved direct use of the Bible. Ernst Kayka suggests that Christian Ernst Wünsch,[56] who reportedly knew the Scriptures well, introduced Kleist to them,[57] while Friedrich Braig intimates that he may have studied the Bible under the guidance of Adam Müller.[58] Whether either of these conjectures corresponds to the facts will probably never be known. But it is apparent that Kleist was by no means totally unfamiliar with the Bible.

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[55]See Chapter II, pp. 70-72 of this dissertation.

[56]See Chapter II, pp. 45-46 of this dissertation.

[57]Kayka, 39-40.

[58]Braig, 321. If Braig's suggestion is valid, it may help explain the fact that Das Käthchen von Heilbronn seems to be marked by an exceptional number of lines with biblical overtones, for Kleist worked on this drama while in close association with Adam Müller.

Kleist's Early Religion and the Enlightenment

One need not read far into Kleist's letters, however, before discovering that his earliest search for God and ultimate meaning clearly takes place outside of the framework of biblical revelation as it is traditionally understood. Kleist's negative assessment of "die Zeremonien der Religion und die Vorschriften des konventionellen Wohlstandes" (II, 491) does not of itself imply a total rejection of the biblical Word; however, his supplementary statement to Ulrike, "Uns beide [sic] . . . müssen um so mehr die Gesetze der Vernunft heilig sein," (II, 491) obviously involves the assumption of a perspective which is essentially extra-biblical in character. The scriptural emphasis on faith as the basic mode of apprehension of God and His truth has been, to all appearances, replaced by confidence in the efficacy of human thought and reason. The acceptance of revealed biblical truth as authoritative has been replaced by an emphasis on empirical observation and intellectual exertion.

This emphasis seems at first blush to indicate close kinship on Kleist's part with the spirit and thought of the German Enlightenment. But critics are not at all of one mind in evaluating the nature of Kleist's involvement in the 18th-century Aufklärung. One line of thought places Kleist solidly in the tradition of the German Enlightenment. Among the earlier proponents of this view are Arthur Eloesser (1904), Hubert Roetteken (1907), Otto Brahm (1911), Philipp Witkop (1922), Walter Silz (1923), and Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer (1925). Witkop in particular states his case in

strong terms:

> Nicht um ein Berufs- und Spezialwissen ist es ihm zu tun: in den Sinn des Lebens und der Schöpfung will er vordringen. In rückhaltlosem intellektualistischem Optimismus, ein glühender Jünger der deutschen Aufklärung, Wielands, Leibnizens, der Popularphilosophie, glaubt er, dass ihn das Wissen, die Philosophie, die reine Logik und ihre Grundlage, die reine Mathematik sicher dahin führen werde."[59]

This line of thought has also persisted in some of the more contemporary studies of Kleist, notably in the works of such scholars as Joachim Maass (1957), Curt Hohoff (1958), E. L. Stahl (1961), Rudolf Ibel (1961), and Hans Mayer (1962). Mayer, for example, states: "Kein Zweifel, es ging Kleist in seinen Anfängen um bürgerliche Aufklärung im weitesten Verstande dessen, was der Begriff unter den Zeitgenossen besagen wollte,"[60] and Ibel makes reference to "die Hartnäckigkeit und Gewaltsamkeit, mit der Kleist den rationalen Weg seines jugendlichen Geistes betreibt. . . ."[61]

Gerhard Fricke, on the other hand, rejects this conception of the young Kleist: "Kleists inneres Anliegen bei dem Lebensplan ist so unaufklärerisch wie möglich, . . . die aufklärerische Naivität . . . ist . . . bereits in der Jugend Kleists überschritten."[62] Heinz Ide, writing in 1961, concurs with Fricke, and apparently is piqued to note that other contemporary critics, like Hohoff, Maass, and Koch, do not.[63] "Die Annahme," he comments, "Kleist denke 1799, dem Jahr seines Abschieds vom Militär und Beginn seines

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[59]Philipp Witkop, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1922), 22.

[60]Hans Mayer, Heinrich von Kleist: Der geschichtliche Augenblick (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1962), 19.

[61]Ibel, 49.

[62]Fricke, 9-10.

[63]See Ide, 12-14.

Studiums, aufklärerisch, und zwar recht flach aufklärerisch, ist psychologisch fragwürdig."[64] Ide acknowledges that Kleist used the terminology common to the Aufklärung, but agrees with Fricke in protesting "dass wir uns hüten müssen, die von Kleist gebrauchten Worte so zu verstehen, wie seine Zeit sie meinte."[65] Ide accordingly devotes a good deal of space in his study of Kleist to an analysis of what the youthful Kleist actually meant when he used such terms as "Vernunft," "Tugend," "Bildung," and "Glück," and attempts to demonstrate that they represent concepts which are in essence totally unique and which reflect Kleist's peculiar, existential Lebensgefühl. Ide does not go so far as to deny all traces of Enlightenment influence on Kleist, but he does insist that to view young Kleist simply as a rationalistic Aufklärer is to fail to perceive the very core of his being:

> In der Art und Weise seiner Wahrheitssuche ist der junge Kleist also durch und durch Verstandesmensch und auf seinem Wege auf weiteren Strecken Aufklärer. Sowie man aber nicht differenziert zu sehen versteht und den Kleist dieser Jahre überhaupt als Rationalisten und Aufklärer abstempelt, verstellt man den Zugang zum Kern und Eigentlichen seines Wesens und Wollens.[66]

To see Kleist as an arid rationalist whose interests center exclusively in die Gesetze der Vernunft, or in the schooling of the intellect, obviously is to ignore other prominent themes present in the letters of his earlier years. "Bei dem ewigen Beweisen und Folgern verlernt das Herz fast zu fühlen; und doch wohnt das Glück nur im Herzen, nur im Gefühl, nicht im Kopfe, nicht im Verstande," (II, 494) he writes in November of 1799. And again:

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[64]Ide, 15.

[65]Ide, 22.

[66]Ide, 100.

"Nein, nein, Wilhelmine . . . nicht die . . . zweideutigen Rechte der Vernunft will ich studieren, an die Rechte meines Herzens will ich mich halten, und ausüben will ich sie, was auch alle Systeme der Philosophen dagegen einwenden mögen" (II, 504). One final example of Kleist's concern for the rights of the heart is found in a letter he wrote while on his "Würzburger Reise": "Ueberhaupt, dünkt mich, alle Zeremonien ersticken das Gefühl. Sie beschäftigen unsern Verstand, aber das Herz bleibt tot" (II, 556). These passages serve to warn against radical over-simplification in the assessment of his earliest tendencies.

Heinz Ide's rather cautious judgment, which, it seems to me, most critics would accept, can serve as a convenient point of departure. Although Ide takes sharp issue with the notion that Kleist ever was a superficial rationalist, he does admit that "mit der Reife zum Jüngling setzt eine Entwicklungsphase ein, die beherrscht wird vom Willen zur denkenden Bewältigung des Lebens."[67] This matter obviously is of direct relevance to our current concern, namely the direction of Kleist's search for religious truth, since Kleist himself regarded what Ide terms the "Bewältigung des Lebens" as a religious activity, as an examination of his own comments readily indicates:

> Ich hatte schon als Knabe (mich dünkt am Rhein durch eine Schrift von Wieland) mir den Gedanken angeeignet, dass die Vervollkommnung der Zweck der Schöpfung wäre. Ich glaubte, dass wir einst nach dem Tode von der Stufe der Vervollkommnung, die wir auf diesem Sterne erreichten, auf einem andern weiter fortschreiten würden, und dass wir den Schatz von Wahrheiten, den wir hier sammelten, auch dort einst brauchen könnten. Aus diesen Gedanken bildete sich so nach und nach eine eigne Religion, und das Bestreben, nie auf einen Augenblick hienieden still zu stehen, und immer unaufhörlich einem höhern

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[67] Ide, 83.

> Grade von Bildung entgegenzuschreiten, ward bald das einzige Prinzip meiner Tätigkeit. Bildung schien mir das einzige Ziel, das des Bestrebens, Wahrheit der einzige Reichtum, der des Besitzes würdig ist. --Ich weiss nicht, liebe Wilhelmine, ob Du diese zwei Gedanken: Wahrheit und Bildung, mit einer solchen Heiligkeit denken kannst, als ich--Das freilich, würde doch nötig sein, wenn Du den Verfolg dieser Geschichte meiner Seele verstehen willst. Mir waren sie so heilig, dass ich diesen beiden Zwecken, Wahrheit zu sammeln, und Bildung mir zu erwerben, die kostbarsten Opfer brachte--Du kennst sie. --Doch ich muss mich kurz fassen (II, 633).

Of great significance is the vital role Kleist assigns to "Bildung" in the above scheme. "Bildung schien mir das einzige Ziel, das des Bestrebens . . . würdig ist." It is, in Kleist's eyes, holy, and its attainment constitutes a basic reason for his decision to leave military service (II, 479). Time and time again in his letters he stresses "Bildung" as an indispensable component of future happiness and as providing the focal point for his--and Wilhelmine's--strivings. "Liebe und Bildung das ist alles, was ich begehre. . ." (II, 574), he writes to Wilhelmine, and in another place: "Aber Liebe und Bildung sind zwei unerlassliche Bedingungen meines künftigen Glückes" (II, 585), and in still another: "Aber auch Du willst nichts, als Liebe und Bildung. . ." (II, 588). He encourages Wilhelmine "immer fortzuschreiten in Deiner Bildung mit Geist und Herz. . ." (II, 564), and recommends the pondering over "Denkübungen" as giving "einen . . . vielseitigen Nutzen für unsre Bildung" (II, 505). Additional indications of the weight he attaches to "Bildung" are also contained in a number of other passages. The point to be underscored here is simply that he ascribes great significance to "Bildung" in his earnest effort to achieve "eine Stufe näher der Gottheit" (II, 586).

As Ide points out, it would be misleading to suggest that "Bildung," as Kleist conceives of it, is to be accomplished solely through the exercise and discipline of the intellect.[68] At the same time, however, it is obvious from his letters that he is in dead earnest about "intellektuelle Bildung als Bildungs w e g,"[69] and that he regards it an absolute necessity if he is to attain the religious goal he has set for himself--namely, the accumulation of "Wahrheit."

The most obvious manifestation of this intellectual emphasis is Kleist's intense interest in the "Wissenschaften." In Fricke's words, Kleist sought to arrive at truth "auf dem Wege der wissenschaftlichen Vertiefung und Bewältigung der Gesamtwirklichkeit. . . . Die Gesamtheit der Wissenschaften erschien ihm somit . . . als der Weg zur Wahrheit. Und der Versuch, sich ihrer auf diesem Wege zu bemächtigen, dünkte ihn zwar eine ungeheure, aber für den nach dem Ewigen und Unbedingten strebenden Geist unabweisbare Aufgabe."[70] Kleist's letters repeatedly give expression to the place of high priority which the "Wissenschaften" have assumed in his life. The first reason he lists for his decision to leave the army is his "Neigung zu den Wissenschaften" (II, 483). He prefers "ein akademisches Amt" to a position in the Prussian civil service because such an academic appointment will grant "alle wissenschaftlichen Genüsse." His "Studienplan" must not be disrupted, regardless of the consequences (II, 504). He feels what amounts to an emotional attachment to the "Wissenschaften"; in a letter to Wilhelmine he

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[68] Ide, 80.

[69] Ide, 80.

[70] Fricke, 10.

makes reference to "meine geliebten Wissenschaften," (II, 585) and in the same letter he suggests that in the happiest of his dreams he envisions "unsre Hütte" located in "einem freundlichen Tale," "und mich in dieser Hütte und Dich und die Wissenschaften, und weiter nichts. . ." (II, 584).

But Kleist's pursuit of the "Wissenschaften" does not merely reflect an insatiable intellectual curiosity or the desire to become a well-rounded person. "Bildung und Wahrheit" are, by his own testimony, religiously weighted goals. "Mir waren sie so heilig, dass ich diesen beiden Zwecken . . . die kostbarsten Opfer brachte" (II, 633). His love of learning gives his life purpose and provides him with anchorage in the midst of "dem Strudel des Lebens" (II, 629).

Further, the intellectual aspect of Kleist's religiously-oriented Bildungsstreben involves more than the mastery of formal academic disciplines. It is also concerned with the careful observation of natural phenomena, with "lernen von der Natur," (II, 593) and a study of human life in general in an effort to identify the Weltgesetze which lie at its base. But all of this activity obviously stands, at least at this stage of Kleist's development, under the aegis of reflective thought, not of faith or the acceptance of biblical revelation.

In summary, Kleist saw his early years of maturity as a religious quest. However, the direction of his religious activity was not governed by an acceptance of the perspective provided by belief in the Bible as revealed religious truth. Instead, he assigned

priority to a steady striving for an ever-higher level of "Bildung," terming this striving "das einzige Prinzip meiner Tätigkeit" (II, 633). Although "Bildung" was not for Kleist purely a matter of the intellect or of the rational apprehension of life, the intellectual element, which involved mastery of the "Wissenschaften," was of undeniably primary significance in this search for religious truth, for "Wahrheit und Bildung." Hence his basic perspective was that of reflective thought, of Denken and Wissen, and not that of Glauben.

Kleist's Kantkrise

In the famous letter dated March 22, 1801, Kleist informs Wilhelmine von Zenge of his encounter with Kantian philosophy and the devastating effect it has had on him. In his own words:

> Vor kurzem ward ich mit der neueren sogenannten Kantischen Philosophie bekannt. . . .
>
> Wenn alle Menschen statt der Augen grüne Gläser hätten, so würden sie urteilen müssen, die Gegenstände, welche sie dadurch erblicken, sind grün--und nie würden sie entscheiden können, ob ihr Auge ihnen die Dinge zeigt, wie sie sind, oder ob es nicht etwas zu ihnen hinzutut, was nicht ihnen, sondern dem Auge gehört. So ist es mit dem Verstande. Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so ist die Wahrheit, die wir hier sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr--und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich--
>
> Ach, Wilhelmine, wenn die Spitze dieses Gedankens Dein Herz nicht trifft, so lächle nicht über einen andern, der sich tief in seinem heiligsten Innern davon verwundet fühlt. Mein einziges, mein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, und ich habe nun keines mehr (II, 634).

Largely because Kleist himself does not elaborate in great detail as to the specific circumstances in which this experience is set, a great deal of critical disagreement has developed concerning various aspects of his Kantkrise. For example, there is no general

concensus as to the identity of the specific work which touched off this crisis in Kleist's life. Older critics, such as Gaudig and Gerzog, are of the opinion that his reading of Kant's Kritik der reinen Vernunft furnished the immediate occasion for his difficulty,[71] while Ernst Cassirer holds to the view that Fichte's Bestimmung des Menschen is the book Kleist read just prior to writing this letter to Wilhelmine.[72] D. F. Scott, on the other hand, while agreeing that Kleist read Fichte, suggests that he must have read his Sonnenklarer Bericht, and not the Bestimmung des Menschen, while Bernhard Luther is convinced that Kleist read neither Fichte nor Kant, but instead Gottfried Christian Kiesewetter's Versuch einer fasslichen Darstellung der wichtigsten Wahrheiten der neueren Philosophie für Uneingeweihte.[73] Finally, Ludwig Muth, rejecting all of the above views, posits the thesis that Kleist did read Kant, but maintains that not the Kritik der reinen Vernunft, but "die Kritik der Urteilskraft, genauer: der zweite Teil, die kritik der teleologischen Urteilskraft, liegt der Kantkrise zugrunde."[74]

Similar disagreement prevails in the matter of whether or not Kleist actually understood the "neuere sogenannte Kantische Philosophie" which caused him such anguish. Falkenfeld,[75] Borkowski,[76]

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[71]See Ludwig Muth, "Kleist und Kant. Versuch einer neuen Interpretation," Kantstudien, Ergänzungshefte, LXVIII (1954), 9.

[72]See Ernst Cassirer, "Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie," Idee und Gestalt (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921), 163.

[73]See Muth, pp. 12, 15.

[74]Muth, 54.

[75]See Muth, 14.

[76]See Muth, 15.

and Gundolf insist that Kleist did not fully understand Kant. "Doch er ist davon nur so tief erschüttert worden, weil er es so flach begriffen hat. . ." writes Gundolf.[77] But Kühnemann feels that Kleist did understand Kant,[78] while Fricke emphasizes that it is less a matter of understanding than of perspective or basic orientation. Because Kleist, according to Fricke, had the experience of "das schlechthin paradoxe existierende Ich,"[79] because his perspective was existential, and not idealistic, the Kantian solution was of necessity an impossibility for him.

Other areas of disagreement could be cited. Fricke sees the Kantkrise as a culmination of a long struggle,[80] while Walter Silz states that "there comes upon Kleist, abruptly and without warning (italics mine), a recognition which destroys forever the premature placidity of his rationalistic system and plunges him into profound distress."[81] It is unnecessary at this point to pursue these various arguments at great length. The material given above will perhaps suffice to suggest why Ludwig Muth comments: "Man kann nun sagen, soviel Kleistbilder, soviel Deutungen der Kantkrise."[82]

Despite the numerous "Deutungen der Kantkrise," however, one thing is certain: the religion of Kleist's youth has been shattered as a result of this crisis. The concrete goals and ideals which he has cherished most of all have been wiped out, and only a

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[77]Friedrich Gundolf, Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1922), 19.

[78]See Muth, 12.

[79]Fricke, 35.

[80]Fricke, 28.

[81]Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 8.

[82]Muth, 16.

vacuum--and Angst--remain. "Eine unaussprechliche Leere erfüllte mein Inneres," (II, 635) he writes, and in another paragraph: "Und dennoch war der einzige Gedanke, den meine Seele in diesem äusseren Tumulte mit glühender Angst bearbeitete, immer nur dieser: dein einziges, dein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken--" (II, 634).

Previously "Wahrheit" had been "der einzige Reichtum, der des Besitzes würdig ist," (II, 633) a posession which was "heilig," one which leads nearer to perfection and thus nearer to God (II, 633). But now, after Kleist's encounter with Kantian philosophy, he is convinced that "wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint" (II, 634). Consequently, an effort to accumulate "einen Schatz von Wahrheiten" is "vergeblich" (II, 634). In his mood of bleak pessimism he now refers to "das Wahre, das sich nirgends findet. . ."(II, 651).

The companion to "Wahrheit" within the framework of Kleist's earlier religion had been "Bildung," "das einzige Ziel, das des Bestrebens . . . würdig ist" (II, 633). In the words of Ludwig Muth: "Sich-Bilden heisst in diesem Zusammenhang Gerichtetsein auf die Ideen des obersten Geistes, heisst Nachvollziehen der Gedanken Gottes."[83] As was noted above, one prominent aspect of this drive for "Bildung" was Kleist's preoccupation with the "Wissenschaften" as the pathway to truth. But even before the Kantkrise there is clear evidence that he has begun to entertain doubts as to the ultimate efficacy of his faith in the "Wissenschaften." "Selbst

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[83]Muth, 29.

die Säule, an welcher ich mich sonst in dem Strudel des Lebens hielt, wankt--Ich meine, die Liebe zu den Wissenschaften," (II,629) he writes his sister Ulrike some six weeks prior to reporting his Kant experience. But after this experience the tone of his language and his feelings becomes much stronger. He writes, for example, of his "innerlicher Ekel vor aller wissenschaftlichen Arbeit," (II, 641) and makes reference to "das traurige Feld der Wissenschaft" (II, 650). While in Paris he still briefly considers spending a year in the study of the natural sciences, (II, 665) but soon observes "dass uns die Wissenschaften weder besser noch glücklicher machen," (II, 681) and eventually, in October of 1801, announces: "Die Wissenschaften habe ich ganz aufgegeben" (II, 693).

Kleist now emphasizes "Handeln," the necessity of doing "etwas Gutes" (II, 692). "Ich kann dir nicht beschreiben," he writes in October of 1801, "wie ekelhaft mir ein wissender Mensch ist, wenn ich ihn mit einem handelnden vergleiche" (II, 693). But mere activity in itself is no solution for him in his radical disorientation. "Wenn ich ewig in diesem rätselhaften Zustand bleiben müsste, mit einem innerlich heftigen Trieb zur Tätigkeit, und doch ohne Ziel--ja dann freilich, dann wäre ich ewig unglücklich. . ." (II, 638). The religious goal which had furnished the guiding star for his earlier strivings has been lost. With the thought that he cannot know truth here below, Kleist's "einziges und höchstes Ziel ist gesunken" (II, 636). He intends to seek "einen neuen Zweck, . . . wenn es einen gibt," (II, 636) but soon states that "es erheben sich heftige Winde, gefährlich schaukelt das Fahrzeug über den Wellen, das Getöse übertönt alle Besinnung, ich kenne nicht einmal

die Himmelsgegend, nach welcher ich steuern soll, und mir flüstert eine Ahndung zu, dass mir mein Untergang bevorsteht-- (II, 641). He simply cannot determine what heaven wants of him, and without a goal life remains empty (II, 635ff).

Gerhard Fricke's comment: "Nicht dass die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit in irgendeinem spekulativ-metaphysischen oder abstrakt-theoretischen Sinne unmöglich war, warf Kleist zu Boden, sondern dass die Frage nach dem göttlichen Sinn seiner zeitlichen Bestimmung unbeantwortbar erschien. . ."[84] is very much to the point. As many of the quotations given above also suggest, Kleist's earlier religion had given focus to all of his activity. It had provided him with a goal for this life and concrete means for striving toward it. With the destruction of his religion, life becomes pointless and even threatening.

Kleist's trip to Paris, planned and undertaken "in dieser Angst," (II, 635) can serve at best to provide him with temporary distraction. His fears concerning the ultimate futility of "Wissen" of pursuing the "Wissenschaften," are only reinforced by his experiences in Paris. Eventually he is able to work out a new ideal for himself, but this new ideal bears little kinship to the goals for which he had lived until March of 1801.

Thus the structure of Kleist's early religion has totally collapsed, because the avenues to religious truth, as he saw them, are shown by Kant to be unreliable. His early search for "Wahrheit und Bildung," which he regarded as a religious quest, proceeded under the assumption that "Wissen" and "Denken" provide access to

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[84]Fricke, 39.

religious truth, to the "göttlicher Grundplan."[85] "Menschliche Denkkraft schafft keinen Zugang zu den transzendenten Wesenheiten--das ist die Quintessenz, die Kleist aus seiner Begegnung mit Kant zieht, und sie erschüttert ihn"[86] writes Günter Blöcker. Thus it is the foundation of his religion which has been destroyed, not isolated religious tenets, and because his religion was not a matter of mere intellectual speculation, but was of profound existential concern, with its loss Kleist feels cut completely adrift--and about to capsize. He desperately feels the need to fulfill his Bestimmung, to live in harmony with the "göttlicher Grundplan," but despairs of ever knowing it. "Alles was mich beunruhigt ist die Unmöglichkeit, mir ein Ziel des Bestrebens zu setzen, und die Besorgnis, wenn ich zu schnell ein falsches ergriffe, die Bestimmung zu verfehlen und so ein ganzes Leben zu verpfuschen--" (II, 654) he writes to Wilhelmine. One thing is certain, however: reflective thought, "die denkende Bewältigung des Lebens," "wissen," the study of the "Wissenschaften"--none of these will ever provide the ultimate answer, the existential religious certainty for which he yearns.[87]

Switzerland

In a letter from Paris dated October 10, 1801, Kleist, after warning Wilhelmine to brace herself, tells her of his intention

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[85]Blöcker, 20. [86]Blocker, 20.

[87]Fricke emphasizes--and correctly, in my opinion--that Kleist was constitutionally unable to accept the Kantian idealistic solution to his problem. (See Fricke, 35ff). Thus Kant, as Kleist read him, served basically only to destroy, or help destroy, his older religious footing, without offering him an acceptable replacement for it.

"in der Schweiz einen Bauerhof zu kaufen, der mich ernähren kann, wenn ich selbst arbeite" (II, 695). And he actually does travel to Switzerland, looks for a suitable farm, (II, 715) makes a tentative selection, (II, 715) purchases and studies books on agriculture, (II, 714) and sends to Ulrike for money so that he can complete the purchase of a Swiss "Landgut" (II, 715). However, because of political unrest and the threat of French military occupation of Switzerland, he postpones making such a purchase, and eventually drops the plan altogether. He does remain in Switzerland from December, 1801, to October, 1802, but devotes most of his time and energy to "Schriftstellerei" (II, 726).

What were the basic considerations which dictated Kleist's decision to become a Swiss farmer? Scholars in the past have tended to ascribe this decision to the influence of Rousseau. Gundolf, for example, makes reference to Rousseauan "Naturverherrlichung" as one of the philosophical currents which Kleist greedily and uncritically "hineingefressen hat,"[88] and Witkop claims that "Rousseau ist der einzige Philosoph, dem er [Kleist] treu geblieben ist. . . . Seinen Aufruf an Herz und Gefühl, seinen Weckruf 'zurück zur Natur' erlebt er leidenschaftlich in Rousseaus Werken mit. . . ."[89] Braig,[90] Blankenagel,[91] and Mayer[92] are also among those who interpret Kleist's Swiss experience in terms of the influence of Rousseau, and E. L. Stahl, in a related vein, notes Kleist's "romantic notions

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[88]Gundolf, 19. [89]Witkop, 46. [90]Braig, 75.

[91]John Blankenagel, The Dramas of Heinrich von Kleist (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 8.

[92]Mayer, 27.

of tilling the soil."[93]

There is little doubt, in my opinion, that Kleist's decision does reveal the influence of Rousseauan thought. But this raises a more basic question: why is he at this juncture particularly open to Rousseau and to the lure of nature? Kleist's letters give at least a partial answer to this question. In letters in which he depicts the attractiveness of life "in der Natur" he emphasizes his desperate longing for "Ruhe," which presumably can be found in nature, or the simple life. "Ach Wilhelmine," he writes in April, 1801, "schenkte mir der Himmel ein grünes Haus, ich gäbe alle Reisen, und alle Wissenschaft, und allen Ehrgeiz auf. . . . Von ganzer Seele sehne ich mich . . . nach Ruhe" (II, 643). A letter written some six weeks later is similar in tone:

> Einzelne Häuser waren hie und da an den Felsen gelehnt, wo ein Fischer oder ein Weinbauer sich angesiedelt hatte. Mir schien ihr Los unbeschreiblich rührend und reizend--das kleine einsame Hüttchen unter dem schützenden Felsen, der Strom, der Kühlung und Nahrung zugleich herbeiführt, Freuden, die keine Idylle malen kann, Wünsche, die nicht über die Gipfel der umschliessenden Berge fliegen--ach, liebe Wilhelmine, ist Dir das nicht auch alles so rührend und reizend wie mir? Könntest Du bei diesem Glück nicht auch alles aufgeben, was jenseits der Berge liegt? Ich könnte es--ach, ich sehne mich unaussprechlich nach Ruhe. (II, 653)

But Kleist's letters indicate that he is not merely fleeing from the torment of his despair into a state of idyllic forgetfullness in nature; rather, he is fleeing to nature as a source of the religious certainty which he has lost but so desperately needs. In nature one can discover "was der Himmel mit uns will," in nature one can find and fulfill the "Bestimmung" so fervently sought. "Ja wer

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[93]Ernst Ludwig Stahl, Heinrich von Kleist's Dramas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 12.

erfüllt eigentlich getreuer seine Bestimmung nach dem Willen der Natur, als der Hausvater, der Landmann?" (II, 653).he asks in May, 1801. In October of the same year he expresses himself even more clearly on this point.

> Unter den persischen Magiern gab es ein religiöses Gesetz: ein Mensch könne nichts der Gottheit Wohlgefälligeres tun, als dieses, ein Feld zu bebauen, einen Baum zu pflanzen, und ein Kind zu zeugen. -- Das nenne ich Weisheit, und keine Wahrheit hat noch so tief in meine Seele gegriffen, als diese. Das soll ich tun, das weiss ich bestimmt-- Ach, Wilhelmine, welch ein unsägliches Glück mag in dem Bewusstsein liegen, seine Bestimmung ganz nach dem Willen der Natur zu erfüllen." (II, 694)

Here the divine will and the means of fulfilling it can be known with certainty. In Fricke's words:

> Die religiöse Ehrfurcht Kleists vor der Natur im weitesten Sinne rührt daher, dass sie ihm gewiss und unwidersprechlich den Willen des Schöpfers widerspiegelt, dass in ihrem ganz konkreten Dasein und Selbstsein der göttliche Imperativ ihrer Existenz selbstverständliches, unbeirrbares Leben geworden ist.[94]

This conviction, according to Fricke, was shared by both Kleist and Rousseau. In fact, this is one of the very elements in Rousseau which was especially attractive to him. "Was Kleist an Rousseau anzog . . . ist die . . . Ehrfurcht vor der Natur, als einer letzten, heiligen Wirklichkeit, in der der sonst verdunkelte Wille Gottes rein und klar erscheint."[95]

Kleist never did become a farmer, but instead became totally absorbed in his literary activities. The fact remains, however, that the stubborn urgency of his intention to become a Swiss farmer derives directly from his central religious concern, his need to know and fulfill his "Bestimmung," to live according to the will

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[94]Fricke, 43.

[95]Fricke, 43.

of the Creator. "Wissen" has proved to be totally unreliable as an avenue toward divine truth, the divine will, and is rejected by Kleist. Replacing, though only temporarily, his confidence in "Wissen" as the source of religious certainty is his reliance upon nature.

"Gefühl" as an Avenue of Religious Truth

Meanings and Use of the Term

Kleist's reliance upon nature as a source of religious truth and of certainty as to his own "Bestimmung" is restricted to a relatively short span of time. Soon another source of religious certainty emerges, another point of contact with the absolute, with the divine will--namely "Gefühl." Because of the prominence of this concept both in Kleist's writings and in recent Kleist scholarship, it seems advisable to dwell upon it at some length.

The first point to be made appears to be quite obvious, but nevertheless is not touched upon in many works on Kleist. Simply stated, the word "Gefühl" as used by Kleist does not always carry the same meaning. Günter Blöcker points this out very explicitly. After noting a few of the various shades of meaning conveyed by the term, he states:

> Daneben aber wird der Begriff auch im Vulgärsinne gebraucht. In Alkmenes Sprache ist Gefühl nicht nur die lenkende und wahrnehmende Fähigkeit des Herzens, sondern auch ganz einfach der körperliche Tastsinn ("Nimm Aug und Ohr, Gefühl mir und Geruch . . ."); und die Marquise von O. meint, wenn sie in dem geschilderten Zusammenhang Gefühl sagt, ihr Körpergefühl, die physischen Signale der Mutterschaft ("Gefühle, immer wiederkehrend und von so wunderbarer Art").[96]

Thus it is quite unwarranted to ascribe profound metaphysical

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[96]Blöcker, 175.

significance to the term each time Kleist uses it. At least a minimal amount of discrimination is necessary.

Furthermore, the relatively infrequent use or even absence of the word "Gefühl" in a given work does not necessarily imply that Kleist is not portraying in that work the religious process or phenomenon normally associated with the term. In the Marquise von O . . ., for example, one can make a fairly convincing case for the proposition that Kleist simply substitutes the word "Bewusstsein" for "Gefühl" at one of the critical points in the Novelle, while retaining the world of meaning of the latter term.[97] Similarly, in Das Kathchen von Heilbronn Gerhard Fricke sees "die triumphierende Unbedingtheit des Gefühls,"[98] even though Kleist himself does not use such terminology in this particular play. Whether critics like Fricke and Blöcker do violence to Kleist's artistic intentions by interpreting these works in terms of "Gefühl" will be discussed later. For the present it will suffice to note that Das Käthchen von Heilbronn and the Marquise von O . . . in particular appear to invite such interpretation, even though Kleist uses the term "Gefühl" only sparingly in them.

The word "Gefühl" is found already in some of Kleist's earliest letters and essays. In his "Aufstaz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden," which probably dates back to early 1799, and thus is one of the earliest Kleist documents at our disposal, he writes: "Ja, es ist im richtigen Sinne sogar möglich, das Schicksal selbst zu leiten, und wenn uns dann auch das grosse allgewaltige Rad einmal

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[97]See, for example, Blöcker, pp. 175-176.

[98]Fricke, 155.

mit sich fortreisst, so verlieren wir doch nie das Gefühl unserer selbst, nie das Bewusstsein unseres Wertes" (II, 310). "Und doch wohnt das Glück nur im Herzen, nur im Gefühl. . ." (II, 494) he states in November, 1799. In describing his reaction to the Catholic worship service in September of 1800 he writes: "Alle Zeremonien ersticken das Gefühl" (II, 556).

As time passes, the term as used by Kleist appears to assume increasingly the meaning it ultimately has in works such as Amphitryon and Der Zweikampf, in which "Gefühl" becomes the source of existential certainty. "Frage dich immer," he admonishes Wilhelmine in January, 1801, "in jeder Lage Deines Lebens ehe du handelst: wie könntest Du hier am edelsten, am schönsten, am vortrefflichsten handeln?-- und was dein erstes Gefühl Dir antwortet, das tue"(II, 612). Writing about his friend Brockes at approximately the same time, he states: "Immer seiner ersten Regung gab er sich ganz hin, das nannte er seinen Gefühlsblick, und ich habe selbst nie gefunden, dass dieser ihn getäuscht habe" (II, 620). And some five years later, in a letter to Ulrike, he makes reference to "die Forderungen, die Dein innerstes Gefühl an Dich macht. . ." (II, 785).

Undoubtedly the clearest expression of Kleist's Evangelium des Gefühls is found in his creative works themselves--although perfect clarity does not reign here either. In Amphitryon, for example, Alkmene, when confronted with a situation which is totally baffling and which threatens her very existence, is tempted, at least temporarily, to distrust her "Gefühl":

> Doch seit ich diesen fremden Zug erblickt,
> Will ich dem innersten Gefühl misstrauen.
> (I, 285, ll. 1250-51)

Jupiter himself, in the guise of Amphitryon, insists however that the God himself has been deceived, not Alkmene's "Gefühl."

> Er war
> Der Hintergangene, mein Abgott! Ihn
> Hat seine böse Kunst, nicht dich getäuscht,
> Nicht dein unfehlbares Gefühl.
> (I, p. 286, ll. 1287-90)

And ever since Alkmene's final "Ach" was first uttered, the critics have disagreed as to whether her "Gefühl" is depicted by Kleist as a reliable source of certainty, or whether it too is subject to confusion.[99]

In other works Kleist's depiction of "Gefühl" appears to be less ambiguous. In Der Zweikampf, for example, written during the last year of his life, he depicts a situation in which the chief female figure, Littegarde, though certain of her innocence and purity, finds the very finger of God apparently condemning her, and is near madness. At this point Friedrich von Trota, who firmly believes her protestations of innocence, counsels her as follows:

> O meine teuerste Littegarde . . . bewahre deine Sinne vor Verzweiflung! türme das Gefühl, das in deiner Brust lebt, wie einen Felsen empor: halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir und über dir zu Grunde gingen! (II, 253)

And ultimately the innocence of Littegarde is proved beyond question.

The Significance of "Gefühl"
as Seen by the Critics

When reading the more recent studies of Kleist, one sometimes gets the impression that Gerhard Fricke was the first to point to the prominent place given "Gefühl" in Kleist's Weltschau. However,

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[99]See, for example, Fricke, 68.

among the critics writing prior to 1930 there are few, if any, who totally ignore its significance. Franz Servaes, writing in 1902, interprets both Das Käthchen von Heilbronn and Penthesilea as dramas concerned with the problem of "Gefühlsverwirrung" and "Gefühlseinheit."[100] Otto Brahm (1911) sees the question of "Gefühlsverwirrung" as central in Amphitryon and Penthesilea, and notes that in Das Käthchen von Heilbronn Kleist depicts "die völlig unfehlbare Sicherheit des Gefühls."[101] Philipp Witkop (1922) states that "Kleists Menschen wurzeln wie er selbst einzig in ihrem Gefühl," and again, in terms remarkably similar to those used later by Fricke: "Das Gefühl ist unser metaphysischer Wesenskern, in ihm offenbart sich uns Gott."[102] Gundolf (1922), on the other hand, does not lay heavy emphasis on the prominence of "Gefühl" as a positive force in Kleist's work. Instead of viewing Käthchen as living out of the religious certainty of "Gefühl," for example, he writes: "Die Gewalt der besessenen hemmungslosen Hingabe sollte darin leben wie in der Penthesilea Erringer- und Bezwingertrieb."[103] But most of the earlier critics do, to a greater or lesser extent, point to the importance of "Gefühl" in Kleist's thought.

Gerhard Fricke, however, in his Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist, which appeared in 1929, ascribes to "Gefühl" a far greater significance than does any of his predecessors. In fact, he maintains that "der Begriff des Gefühls ist vom Amphitryon an der

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[100]Servaes, pp. 91, 92, 109.

[101]Brahm, pp. 162, 220, 280.

[102]Witkop, pp. 68, 161.

[103]Gundolf, 110.

Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Problematik Kleists und seiner Dichtung."[104] Consequently, he seeks to interpret the various plays and Novellen from the perspective of "Gefühl," the "Hieroglyphe des Kleistschen Wesens und seines tiefsten Problems. . . ."[105]

Fricke's existential emphasis and his insight into the centrality of "Gefühl" in Kleist's thought have been in large measure accepted and even further developed by later critics. Clemens Lugowski (1936), though surely not in total agreement with Fricke at all points, does openly affirm his acceptance of the "Urkern von Frickes Auffassung."[106] Similarly, Oskar von Xylander (1937) by his own admission grounds his study of Kleist on the "prinzipielle Grundlage" developed by Fricke, and accepts his emphasis on "Gefühl" as the key to an adequate understanding of Kleist.[107] Although Bernt von Heiseler (1939) does not explicitly indicate agreement with Fricke, his work too reveals a substantial measure of affinity with Frickean thought.[108]

At least three of the longer Kleist studies published most recently, since 1960, also contain emphases clearly reminiscent of Fricke. Günter Blöcker's Heinrich von Kleist oder das absolute Ich is written from an existentialist perspective and contains a discussion

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[104]Fricke, 71. [105]Fricke, 29.

[106]Clemens Lugowski, Wirklichkeit und Dichtung (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1936), 137.

[107]Oskar Ritter von Xylander, Heinrich von Kleist und J. J. Rousseau ("Germanische Studien," Heft 93; Berlin: Verlag Emil Ebering, 1937), 136, 294.

[108]See Bernt von Heiseler, Kleist (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1939), pp. 43, 67.

of "Gefühl" which shows a number of points of contact with Fricke's ideas.[109] Rudolf Ibel's (1961) conception of Kleistian "Gefühl" as a "metaphysische Macht" which constitutes the "innerer Schwerpunkt"[110] of life also bears obvious kinship to Fricke's thought. And finally there is the work of Heinz Ide (1961), who by his own statement regards his study of Kleist as a continuation and expansion of Fricke's Gefühl und Schicksal.

It would be misleading to suggest that Fricke's emphases, including his stress on the significance of "Gefühl," have been universally accepted. Hermann August Korff's work, published in 1933, "zeigt keine Berührung mit Fricke,"[111] in the words of Xylander. The works of Stahl, Silz, and Maass also appear by and large to go their own way, relatively independent of Fricke. Walter Müller-Seidel, whose Versehen und Erkennen appeared in 1961, acknowledges the validity of many of Fricke's insights, but suggests among other things that "das Kleistbild der neueren Forschung viel zu einseitig von der Verherrlichung des Gefühls bestimmt wurde, . . ." and insists that recent discussions of this subject reveal inadequate discrimination of the part of the critics.[112] Müller-Seidel also questions the alleged universality of the theme of the "'existentielle Heiligkeit' und 'Wirklichkeit' des Gefühls" in Kleist's works. He notes, for example, that this theme is at best peripheral in Die Hermannsschlacht, and voices the suspicion that neither Fricke

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[109]See, for example, Blöcker's discussion of "Gefühl" as found on pp. 160-196.

[110]Ibel, 35.

[111]Xylander, 151.

[112]Walter Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen: Eine Studie über Heinrich von Kleist (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1961), 130.

nor Lugowski treats Der Findling precisely because it resists interpretation in terms of the allegedly universal Kleistian emphasis on "Gefühl."[113]

And finally there is Friedrich Koch (1958), who disagrees most violently with Fricke, accusing him of one-sidedness and a lack of respect for the text of Kleist's works. Thus he sees as part of his task "die Korrektur des Bildes von Kleists Leben und Erleben, wie es seit Gerhard Fricke weithin die Kleistdeutung beherrscht."[114]

> Fricke fand als das rettende Grunderlebnis Kleists die Erfahrung des 'Gefühls', die eine gewisse Phase seines Lebens bestimmt, und interpretiert sie in die anderen Lebensabschnitte hinein. Unter den mancherlei Versuchen Kleists, seinem Leben einen Sinn zu gewinnen, hebt er diesen besonders hervor und macht ihn zum Grundzug des Kleistschen Lebens überhaupt. Aus dieser Einseitigkeit gilt es das Bild von Kleists Leben zu befreien."[115]

Koch claims that his own interpretation of Kleist's works, on the other hand, is to be "eine Interpretation des Kleistschen Werkes aus dem Werk selbst. Ausgangspunkt ist die Zerstörung des Bewusstseins als Grundsituation der Kleistschen Dichtung."[116] Or as he states in another passage: "Diese Grundsituation der unbewussten Festlegung der Wirklichkeit vom Bewusstsein her in Wollen oder Vorstellen, die Situation des 'Versehens' an der Welt und den Menschen samt der daraus sich ergebenden Zerstörung des Bewusstseins bis hin zur Ohnmacht ist das Thema in allen seinen Werken."[117] And the same is true of Kleist's own life, according to Koch: "Immer von neuem erfuhr Kleist diesen Zwiespalt zwischen Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit; durch

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[113]Müller-Seidel, pp. 52, 69.

[114]Friedrich Koch, Heinrich von Kleist, Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958), "Vorwort," 1.

[115]Koch, "Vorwort," 1. [116]Koch, "Vorwort," 1. [117]Koch, 45.

alle seine Werke hindurch ist dieses Grundproblem deutlich spürbar. Sein Dichtertum brachte zuzeiten eine innere Lösung, doch nie eine Erlösung."[118] Koch thus rejects the "Gefühl-Schicksal" scheme in favor of "Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit," although he does admit that "Gefühl" was determinative during one restricted phase of Kleist's life.

Difficulty in Definition of Terms

The term "Gefühl" itself, as used by Kleist, seems to defy clear and concise definition. As one reads in the sizeable body of Kleist scholarship, one can readily comprehend the thrust of Müller-Seidel's reference to "das viel berufene und ohnehin undefinierte Gefühl."[119] Earlier scholars in particular, such as Meyer-Benfey, Federn, and Servaes, tend to use the concept loosely, without attempting a consistent definition of terms. Eloesser does not totally ignore this matter, but his rather limited attempts at definition are also unsatisfactory. He sees "Gefühl" in the Marquise von O . . ., for example, as "die leicht zu trübende aber nie zu verschüttende Kraftquelle des Menschen," and appears in his discussion of Das Käthchen von Heilbronn simply to equate or at least closely associate "Gefühl" with "dem Urtriebe."[120] Roetteken too is not totally clear at this point; he seems to identify

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[118]Koch, 45.

[119]Walter Müller-Seidel, "Kleist und die Gesellschaft. Eine Einführung," Kleist und die Gesellschaft. Eine Diskussion, ed. Walter Müller-Seidel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1965), 28.

[120]Arthur Eloesser, Heinrich von Kleist, eine Studie ("Die Literatur," Vol. XVI; Berlin: Bard Marquardt et Co., 1904), pp. 45, 52.

it with passion or strong feelings in general, or with "dem unmittelbaren instinktiven Antriebe."[121] Witkop's discussion of "Gefühl," on the other hand, though limited, is somewhat more useful. He points out, for example, Kleist's conviction "dass nur das Gefühl, das Irrationale und Unbewusste unser metaphysischer Wesenskern sei, in dem sich Gott uns offenbare, . . . ,"[122] and in another passage states that "Kleists Menschen wurzeln wie er selbst einzig in ihrem Gefühl. . . . Nur das unergründliche, unbedingte Gefühl ihres Selbst, das sich nie ganz im Zwist und Wirrsal des äusseren Geschehens verliert, sondern sich immer wieder in seinem Eigengesetz her stellt, gibt ihnen Wegrichtung und Wegsicherheit."[123] But Witkop too fails by and large to give a clearly articulated and systematic analysis of the essence and function of "Gefühl."

It is this situation to which Fricke refers when he bemoans the lack of "eine eingehende Untersuchung über das Wesen des Kleistschen Gefühlsbegriffes. . . . Anstatt dessen," he continues, "hat man vielfach unbekümmert den Inhalt des Gefühlsbegriffes als eindeutig und allgemein bekannt, oder wenigstens ganz leicht, mit einigen Begriffen umschreibbar angenommen."[124] Fricke, who sees the concept of "Gefühl" as the key to an understanding of Kleist, attempts in his work to define it and to describe its source and function.

The "Ich," according to Fricke, is for Kleist the basis of human existence, the source of absolute religious certainty.[125]

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[121]Hubert Roetteken, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: Verlag von Quelle & Meyer, 1907), pp. 15, 84, 85.

[122]Witkop, 261.

[123]Witkop, 68.

[124]Fricke, 71.

[125]Fricke, 63.

But this primal religious certainty communicates itself, as it were, via "Gefühl." "Die religiöse Urwirklichkeit des Ich tritt innerhalb der psychologischen Sphäre in dem entscheidenden Phänomen des Gefühls zutage,"[126] he writes. "Gefühl" is the religiously grounded conscience of the person. "Das Gefühl aber ist . . . die unmittelbare, momentane Einigung des psychologisch-vordergründlichen Bewusstseins des Ich mit seinem metapsychologischen, ewigen Existenzgrunde; es ist das 'Gewissen' des Ich. . . ."[127] Because of this religious rooting, "Gefühl" is not merely a psychological process. "Das Gefühl, jeder psychologischen Deutung als Sentiment, Instinkt, dunkler Trieb sich gänzlich entziehend, ist ein metapsychologischer, religiöser Vorgang. . . ." "Gefühl," as the channel of ultimate religious truth, is at the same time the avenue by which one arrives at certainty as to how he is to live from moment to moment. "In dem absolut-individuellen, existentiellen Vorgang des Gefühls tut sich der geheimnisvolle Weg zum Ewigen, zum Herzen der Dinge auf, und das Ich fühlt,--nicht, was immer und zu allen Zeiten und für alle grundsätzlich geboten ist,--sondern was für es selbst die Forderung des Jetzt und Hier bedeutet."[128] This explains, says Fricke, Kleist's "immer stärkere Hinwendung zu dem Gefühl, das bei ihm nicht der Ausdruck kontemplativer Passivität, sondern Voraussetzung, Ermöglichungsgrund des Handelns ist."[129] Kleist's figures too, following the dictates of "Gefühl," are in harmony with the Divine Will for the here and now. And in living thus, in harmony with the

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[126] Fricke, 71.

[127] Fricke, 75.

[128] Fricke, 31.

[129] Fricke, 36.

Eternal, says Fricke, one finds unsurpassed strength; as in Amphitryon, one learns "dass der Mensch in dem absolut-individuellen, metaphysischen Gefühl seiner selbst, in der unmittelbaren Einheit mit seinem ewigen Ich eine Kraft besitzt, die ihn nicht wanken lässt, an der die ganze widersprechende Wirklichkeit zerschellt."[130]

It would be possible to go on at some length exploring the various reactions of more recent critics to Fricke's conception of Kleistian "Gefühl," and their ensuing modifications of his ideas. However, since this becomes an extremely involved matter, it will perhaps be sufficient for the purposes of this dissertation to take note of one particular aspect of this broader discussion, namely the conception of "Gefühl" as an avenue of religious truth, of immediate revelation, as it were, of contact with the Divine.

Fricke sees Kleistian "Gefühl" as a phenomenon in which "der geheimnisvolle Weg zum Ewigen"[131] is opened. Several later critics, undoubtedly greatly influenced by Fricke, have written in the same strain. "Das Gefühl," writes Xylander, "ist unser einziger Zugang zur Unendlichkeit und unsere einzige Gewissheit im Leben. . . ."[132] And in his discussion of Amphitryon he expresses a similar conviction--that "Gefühl" provides "den Widerschein des Göttlichen" within the boundaries of human life.[133]

Rudolf Ibel too sees "Gefühl" as a type of divine revelation. "Es ist," he writes, "unmittelbare Aeusserung des metaphysischen, das heisst untergründig-göttlichen Lebensgeheimnisses. . . . Es

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[130]Fricke, 85.

[131]Fricke, 31.

[132]Fricke, 250.

[133]Fricke, 296.

wird für Kleist die einzige Macht welcher der Mensch zu gehorchen verpflichtet ist; denn in ihr wirkt Gott."[134] And in a later paragraph: "Der Mensch ist vielmehr mit dem Gefühl, das nicht nur im Ich wurzelt, mit dem aussermenschlichen Weltgrund verbunden, wie das Kind durch die Nabelschnur mit dem Nährstoff der Mutter."[135] And finally there is Günter Blöcker, who in his discussion of Amphitryon makes reference to the "Gottesunmittelbarkeit" of Alkmene's "Gefühl," and says of it: "Ihr zu traumhafter Sicherheit geläutertes Gefühl ist selber von himmlischer Art, es ist eine Offenbarung des göttlichen Willens. . . ."[136] Basic to the ideas of each of these critics is a concept of "Gefühl" as an avenue of religious truth, of contact with God.

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But what about Kleist's works themselves, for they are of primary importance in this study. Do they actually portray "Gefühl" as a power which affords ultimate, intensely concrete answers to the religious questions confronting Kleist's characters in this life? This question with all of its ramifications becomes exceedingly complex, and cannot simply be answered by recourse to broad generalizations. It will instead be necessary to treat each work individually and then, if possible, to formulate summarizing statements.

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[134]Ibel, 65. [135]Ibel, 82.

[136]Blöcker, pp. 170, 172.

CHAPTER IV

"GEFÜHL" IN KLEIST'S DRAMAS AND NOVELLEN

Der Zweikampf

> Türme das Gefühl, das in deiner Brust lebt, wie einen Felsen empor: halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir und über dir zu Grunde gingen![1]

Der Zweikampf is the first of Kleist's works to be considered in this discussion, since the problem of living out of "Gefühl" appears, at least on the surface, to be formulated with unusual clarity and directness in this Novelle. For example, the term "Gefühl" itself is used at the critical juncture in this narrative, whereas in Die Marquise von O . . . Kleist employs the word "Bewusstsein" when apparently referring to the same phenomenon. Furthermore, Der Zweikampf contains a forthright and unmistakable admonition to reliance upon "Gefühl," as well as a vindication of Friedrich von Trota, its outspoken proponent.

The situation toward the end of the Novelle is briefly as follows: God Himself, speaking through the outcome of the duel, apparently has adjudged Littegarde guilty, despite her firm knowledge

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[1] Werke, II, 253. Subsequent volume and page references to Kleist's works in this chapter will be made in parentheses. Kleist's dramas, to which frequent line reference will be made, are contained in Volume I of the edition cited throughout this dissertation, the "Sembdner edition."

of her own innocence, and thereby also seems to give the lie to Friedrich's Vertrauen. Littegarde, whose basic integrity, whose very existence is threatened by this incomprehensible and devastating state of affairs, appears to be on the verge of madness. In this situation, when both circumstantial evidence and the divine judgment itself seem to speak against her, Friedrich continues to believe in her innocence and admonishes her:

> O meine teuerste Littegarde . . . bewahre deine Sinne vor Verzweiflung! türme das Gefühl, das in deiner Brust lebt, wie einen Felsen empor: halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir und über dir zu Grunde gingen! Lass uns, von zwei Gedanken, die die Sinne verwirren, den verständlicheren und begreiflicheren denken, und ehe du dich schuldig glaubst, lieber glauben, dass ich in dem Zweikampf den ich für dich gefochten, siegte! (II, 253-54)

And ultimately Littegarde's innocence is established beyond a doubt, she and Friedrich marry, and all ends happily.

Both Littegarde and Friedrich see their problem to be religious. Littegarde is in a situation which compels her to doubt either God's truthfulness or her own integrity, her very self, and since the rejection of either is an impossibility for her, only despair remains. Her initial response to Friedrich's question as to her guilt or innocence is: "Schuldig, überwiesen, verworfen, in Zeitlichkeit und Ewigkeit verdammt und verurteilt," (II, 251) but her problem is not simply one of guilt, for she follows these words with "Gott ist wahrhaftig und untrüglich; geh, meine Sinne reissen, und meine Kraft zerbricht. Lass mich mit meinem Jammer und meiner Verzweiflung allein" (II, 251). In other words, the truth of her own being, which cannot be denied, and the incontrovertible

truth of God appear to be in contradiction, and Littegarde's existence in the here and now has become meaningless, even an impossibility.

Friedrich sees the problem in similar terms, but refuses to recognize the ultimate validity of the impossible choice which Littegarde is facing. He can doubt neither her innocence nor the veracity of God; both are utter certainties. He is unwilling to cancel out either of them in favor of the other. But it is striking to note that in the concrete situation in which he finds himself, he appeals to Littegarde to hold fast to her "Gefühl," come what may, to find meaning and anchorage in it as an ultimately unshakeable reality. He would rather believe that God did not speak through the duel, at least not in the accepted fashion--a revolutionary, even heretical thought in his day, than that Littegarde's "Gefühl" is in error. The ultimate court of appeal in the quest for meaning in the existential situation is "Gefühl": "Halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir und über dir zu Grunde gingen!" (II, 253).

It follows, then, that "Gefühl" as portrayed in this Novelle is neither a psychological device nor a merely emotional response to a given situation, but is instead, in Blöcker's words, "ein Mittel der Wahrnehmung," "eine bebende Stimme der Wahrheit, . . . das einzige, . . . was dem Menschen eine Chance gibt, der schwankenden Welt mit einiger Festigkeit zu begegnen."[2] Friedrich does not conceive of reliance upon "Gefühl" as a flight from enigmatic reality, but rather as a rock of certainty within reality, as furnishing the only

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[2]Günter Blöcker, Heinrich von Kleist oder das absolute Ich (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1960), 162-163.

reliable perspective for the interpretation of reality. If meaning is to be found, if the Divine Will is to be known, it will be known only "durch die Treue gegen das Gefühl,"[3] and this, as Fricke reminds us, defies logical or philosophical demonstration; it is a matter of faith.[4]

But is "Gefühl" as a source of religious certainty reliable? Does "Gefühl" triumph in the Novelle, or is it some other force which ultimately brings about victory? Otto Brahm suggests that Littegarde's "Gefühl" does not triumph "rein menschlich," but in order that it may carry the day, "eine wunderbare Fügung Gottes" has to occur.[5] Friedrich Koch expresses a similar sentiment. In Der Zweikampf, he tells us, "wird es Kleist nur auf Grund des göttlichen Eingreifens möglich, seine Gestalten vor der völligen Zerstörung zu retten. . . ."[6] And in a later paragraph: "Das Gefühl, in dem Sinn, wie Kleist es sich wünscht, gibt es nicht."[7] Walter Silz, on the other

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[3]Gerhard Fricke, Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1929), 149.

[4]The words of Friedrich's admonition: "Türme das Gefühl . . . wie einen Felsen empor: halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir und über dir zu Grunde gingen! (II, 253) bear a tone reminiscent of New Testament biblical passages, particularly: "Himmel und Erde werden vergehen; aber meine Worte werden nicht vergehen" (Matt. 24:35), and "Du bist Petrus, und auf diesen Felsen will ich bauen meine Gemeinde, und die Pforten der Hölle sollen sie nicht überwältigen (Matt. 16:18). These texts emphasize the quality of permanence the New Testament ascribes to the Word and the Christian Church. It appears likely to me that Kleist, by using the language he does, intends to reinforce the permanence and reliability of "Gefühl" as a religious phenomenon.

[5]Otto Brahm, Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist (Neue Ausgabe; Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911), 415.

[6]Friedrich Koch, Heinrich von Kleist, Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958), 134.

[7]Koch, 135.

hand, prefers to keep God out of the interpretation. "The outcome of Der Zweikampf," he writes, "after all is said and suffered, is a solution without God, in purely human terms. . . . It was only Friedrich's human faith in Littegarde, plus delay, that caused the human error to appear."[8]

In response to these comments it should be said in the first place that both Brahm and Koch appear to view the power and victory of "Gefühl" to be established only if the Novelle has a so-called "happy ending," if the lives of the hero and heroine are spared. This assumption, it seems to me, is at best of limited validity. A careful reading of Friedrich's statements immediately before and after his "türme das Gefühl, das in deiner Brust lebt, wie einen Felsen empor," will show that he, at least, does not regard the vindication of "Gefühl" and its "praktische Konsequenz,"[9] "Vertrauen," to be dependent upon Littegarde's and his own immediate acquittal and the sparing of their lives.

> Im Leben lass uns auf den Tod, und im Tode auf die Ewigkeit hinaus sehen, und des festen, unerschütterlichen Glaubens sein: deine Unschuld wird, und wird durch den Zweikampf, den ich für dich gefochten, zum heitern, hellen Licht der Sonne gebracht werden! (II, 254).

In other words, confidence in "Gefühl" furnishes first of all a new perspective, a new faith, one which gives meaning for time and eternity--regardless of the length of one's temporal existence. Friedrich's joy is not grounded in the confidence that his impending death will be averted; rather, it is because death has lost its

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[8]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 66.

[9]Blöcker, 51.

sting, to employ New Testament terminology, that he can rejoice. "Deine Worte geben mir das Leben wieder; der Tod schreckt mich nicht mehr, und die Ewigkeit, soeben noch wie ein Meer unabsehbaren Elends vor mir ausgebreitet, geht wieder, wie ein Reich voll tausend glänziger Sonnen, vor mir auf!" (II, 253) he exclaims. Death has been overcome by faith, faith which is manifested in Vertrauen and reliance upon "Gefühl."

Secondly, Silz's statement that "it was only Friedrich's human faith in Littegarde, plus delay, that caused the human error to appear" reveals, in my opinion, a tendency toward a somewhat superficial understanding of this Novelle. Kleist's concern in Der Zweikampf is not with the mere depiction and discovery of "human error," but with the portrayal of a devastatingly chaotic situation which threatens to engulf his characters, a situation which defies the powers of human comprehension. God and life have become menacing puzzles, and Kleist shows a way to exist meaningfully in the face of it all. Then too, what is the meaning of Silz's statement that Friedrich's Vertrauen "caused the human error to appear?" There is no textual evidence to support such a statement. Once again, what Kleist does depict is the possibility of living in faith in the midst of a threatening world of enigma.

And third, the above comments give rise to a consideration of the position of God in Der Zweikampf. It is extremely difficult to define the precise relationship between God and "Gefühl" in this particular Novelle. Friedrich apparently does not consider reliance upon either of them to negate the need for the other. In one breath he fervently counsels Littegarde to hold fast to her "Gefühl," and

in the next he prays: "Gott, Herr meines Lebens . . . bewahre meine Seele selbst vor Verwirrung!" (II, 254). Neither he nor Littegarde can doubt the "Wahrhaftigkeit Gottes," but Friedrich in particular seems to question man's ability to perceive God's truth at will. "Wo liegt die Verpflichtung der höchsten göttlichen Weisheit, die Wahrheit im Augenblick der glaubensvollen Anrufung selbst, anzuzeigen und auszusprechen?"(II, 254). And in the face of this situation of not knowing, he admonishes Littegarde to hold fast to her "Gefühl," which in this life of "seeing through a glass darkly" is the sole means of attaining any measure of truth or certainty. The truth for which both of them are searching is the truth of God, but at the same time it would be inaccurate to designate "Gefühl" a channel of prayer, in the traditional sense of the term. "Gefühl" takes the path inward, to the Ich, as the avenue to existential truth, and the path inward is not identical, within the framework of orthodox Christian thought, to the way of Christian prayer. Nevertheless, it is the truth of God which Littegarde and Friedrich are seeking, and "Gefühl" furnishes, as it were, the touchstone by which one must "test the spirits" to see whether they are indeed the spirits of truth.

Kleist's portrayal of "Gefühl" in this particular Novelle is thus relatively optimistic. It gives Friedrich and Littegarde a perspective from which they can live their lives and perceive some semblance of truth in the midst of chaos. Nor does the world itself seem to be governed by a malevolent force or Deity.[10] Despite the

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[10]Fricke goes so far as to state that in this Novelle reality stands clearly subservient to God's power, which He uses in a providential way to effect the vindication of Friedrich and Littegarde (Fricke, 149).

fact, however, that Der Zweikampf is one of the very last works written by Kleist, one cannot use it as the basis for generalizations as to the nature of his religion and his concept of "Gefühl," since each of his works is marked by a tone uniquely its own. If generalizations can be made at all, they must be based on the total body of Kleist's work.

Amphitryon

Ihn
Hat seine böse Kunst, nicht dich getäuscht,
Nicht dein unfehlbares Gefühl!
(Vol. I, ll. 1288-90)

Kleist's three-act drama Amphitryon, written in 1806 in Königsberg, has been acclaimed by Thomas Mann as "das witzig-anmutvollste, das geistreichste, das tiefste und schönste Theaterspielwerk der Welt."[11] But this same play has perhaps occasioned a greater measure of fundamental disagreement among the critics than any other single work written by Kleist. Take, for example, the basic question of whether or not this drama is in essence a "Lustspiel," as Kleist himself terms it. One school of thought stoutly insists that Amphitryon is indeed a comedy, while a second school of thought is equally adamant in its contention that it is a tragedy, and a third terms it a tragi-comedy.[12] And there appears to be no

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[11]Thomas Mann, "Amphitryon," Die Neue Rundschau, XXXIX (1928), 574.

[12]A comprehensive review of the critical literature on Amphitryon originating prior to the year 1943 is contained in the dissertation of Clarence K. Pott, "Heinrich von Kleist's Amphitryon in the Critical Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Germanic Languages and

prospect of a critical concensus on this matter in the near future.

In this drama, as in Der Zweikampf, Kleist uses the specific term "Gefühl" in connection with the central problem confronting his main character. Alkmene, when shaken by external evidence in the form of a diadem inscribed with a "J," which seems to contradict her firm inner feeling of innocence and of fidelity to her husband, makes the statement:

> Doch seit ich diesen fremden Zug erblickt,
> Will ich dem innersten Gefühl misstrauen. (ll. 1250-51)

Jupiter, in an effort to reassure her, insists that her "unfehlbares Gefühl" did not deceive her (ll. 1287-90). Thus the question arises: is Jupiter to be believed at this point? Is Alkmene's "Gefühl" reliable or is it too prey to deception? The remainder of this play does not seem to provide a totally clear answer to this question. Nor does Alkmene's final, enigmatic "Ach!" serve to clarify the issue. It is used instead by critics, of whatever stripe they may be, as evidence to buttress their widely divergent points of view.

There is considerably less disagreement when it comes to identifying the nature of Alkmene's plight. Much like Littegarde in Der Zweikampf, she suffers, in Prof. Nordmeyer's words, from "den vernichtenden Einbruch des unmittelbar Sinnlosen in ihre Existenz."[13] No mere intellectual construct is called into question

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Literatures, University of Michigan, 1943).

The disagreement on the comedy-tragedy issue which is so prominent in the earlier literature on Kleist has continued on to the present time. Sten Flygt, H.W. Nordmeyer, and Walter Müller-Seidel are among those contemporary critics who view Amphitryon as a comedy, albeit not in a conventional sense, while Friedrich Koch, Walter Silz, and E.L. Stahl term it a tragedy. Karl Guthke, on the other hand, argues that the play is a tragi-comedy, a position expressly rejected by Müller-Seidel.

[13] H. W. Nordmeyer, "Kleists 'Amphitryon.' Zur Deutung der Komödie," Monatshefte, XXXIX (1947), 106.

as a result of her baffling experience with Jupiter; fidelity in her love for Amphitryon is the absolute existential prerequisite for life itself. It is a matter of "to be or not to be," as Alkmene herself states:

> Ich will nichts hören, leben will ich nicht,
> Wenn nicht mein Busen mehr unsträflich ist.
> (ll. 1278-79).

Previously her "Gefühl" had been her reliable life-principle; in adherence to its dictates she had maintained her inner purity and integrity, had fulfilled her calling, her Bestimmung, and life had made sense. But now, as a result of what has happened to her, she feels compelled to doubt its trustworthiness, and if her doubts are shown to have substance, her world has become unbegreiflich, impenetrable, absurd--and there is no going on. If her "Gefühl" is deceptive, it is impossible for her to live in her integrity, and death is the only way out. "Gefühl," it bears repeating, is not a psychological or emotional device; it is Alkmene's "Lebensorgan," to use Lugowski's term, the vital principle without which she cannot survive, the oracle of the Divine Will. It furnishes her with existential religious certainty, with the knowledge of "was der Himmel mit uns will," to use the terminology of the younger Kleist, and thus with meaning in a world otherwise meaningless.

But what is Kleist's intent in Amphitryon? Is he attempting to demonstrate the reliability of "Gefühl," or is he voicing doubts concerning its ultimate adequacy? "In Amphitryon," writes E. L. Stahl, "feeling even of the purest kind is shown to be fallible."[14] Not so, objects Günter Blöcker: "Nicht die Hinfälligkeit des

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[14]E. L. Stahl, Heinrich von Kleist's Dramas (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 59.

menschlichen Gefühls wurde durch das göttliche Experiment bewiesen, sondern seine Beharrlichkeit, die Unbeirrbarkeit seiner weltverwandelnden Kraft."[15] Federn's statement that "in beider Gatten Lage fand er das, was ihn immer zugleich erschreckte und anzog und was in der Tat zum Schlimmsten gehört, was ein Mensch empfinden kann, die Verwirrung des eigenen Gefühls,"[16] is opposed by Lugowski's curt "niemals ist ihr [Alkmenes] Gefühl verwirrt worden."[17] And over against Walter Silz's contention that "this, her essential and seemingly unerrable [sic] feeling, nevertheless errs grievously . . ."[18] stands Fricke's conviction that "das Grundthema der Dichtung" is "dass der Mensch in dem absolut-individuellen, metaphysischen Gefühl seiner selbst . . . eine Kraft besitzt, die ihn nicht wanken lässt. . . ."[19] And one could go on at some length citing contradictory evaluations of Kleist's basic intention in Amphitryon.

In the face of such diversity of opinion one hesitates to make dogmatic judgments on almost any aspect of the play--including its author's concept of "Gefühl." No interpretation of this drama, it seems to me, can claim for itself such unquestioned authority as to preclude valid dissenting opinion. But it is at the same time necessary to form some sort of judgment based on a careful reading of the text and a reasoned consideration of all the factors involved.

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[15]Blöcker, 171.

[16]Karl Federn, Das Leben Heinrich von Kleists (Berlin: Brückenverlag, 1929), 148.

[17]Clemens Lugowski, Wirklichkeit und Dichtung (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1936), 148.

[18]Silz, Heinrich von Kleist, 47.

[19]Fricke, 85.

Within the context of this particular drama Kleist does not offer an alternative to reliance upon "Gefühl," should it be threatened. In response to Alkmene's first uneasy questioning of her "innerstes Gefühl," Jupiter only affirms its infallibility (ll. 1287-90). He does not offer another way out. Nor does Alkmene herself conceive of the possibility of a satisfactory alternative. Her only recourse in the quest for an ultimately meaningful personal existence is to "Gefühl."

A second observation, one following directly from the first, is that the loss or threatened loss of "Gefühl" as a reliable source of truth and meaning is obviously of crucial significance; in fact, it is literally a matter of life and death, as was noted above. Because "Gefühl" is the only avenue to the heart of things, to existential certainty, to the Absolute, to God, its loss necessarily involves a loss of meaning and the triumph of despair. If Alkmene's "Gefühl" has in the final analysis failed her, her final "Ach!" can only be an expression of absolute futility and the prelude to death itself.

Obviously, the question of whether Kleist portrays "Gefühl" as adequate or inadequate for meeting life's challenges cannot be answered by a simple appeal to a specific line or passage in the play. Alkmene herself does appear at one point in the play (l. 2253ff.) to be convinced of its inadequacy, but Jupiter makes statements which contradict her convictions in this matter. Consequently, an effort to probe this problem necessarily involves an examination of the entire complex of the drama.

If one concentrates solely on Alkmene and extracts her from the broader context of the play, one cannot avoid, in my opinion, viewing the matter as deeply tragic. She is a woman whose very life hinges on her existential purity, on her fidelity to her husband, and she is tricked into giving herself to another. Her "Gefühl" has betrayed her and has plunged her into abysmal despair--so poignantly expressed, then, in her final, agonized "Ach!" Thus runs the argument.

But if one views Alkmene within the context of her world and the entire drama, Kleist's designation of the play as a "Lustspiel" does make sense, although some questions will doubtlessly remain unanswered. If one views her situation within the entire dramatic complex, a measure of light is cast, in the first place, upon Jupiter's visit and its consequences and significance. It must be remembered that Jupiter <u>is</u> a god, and thus Amphitryon, for one, is not offended by his visit, but regards it in the final scene of the play as a signal honor. And this is the same Amphitryon who had previously been so sensitive about his personal "Ehre."[20] One can of course counter this observation with the retort that 1) Amphitryon is made of coarser stuff than Alkmene and thus cannot understand

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[20]See, for example, such lines as:

Doch heute knüpft der Faden sich von jenseits
An meine Ehre und erdrosselt sie (ll. 910-11).

And when he suspects that his wife has entertained another man, Amphitryon responds:

O dieser Dolch, er trifft das Leben mir!
Nein, nein, Verräterin, ich war es nicht! (ll. 970-71).

And similarly:

Schmachvoll, wie die Beleidgung ist, die sich
Mir zugefügt, ist dies das Mindeste,
Was meine Ehre blutend fordern kann (ll. 991-93).

the despair and consternation the god caused in her more sensitive soul, and 2) that the only reason he ultimately welcomes Jupiter's visit is because it feeds his own ego. But even then, the fact remains that Amphitryon does reverence him as a god ("Anbetung dir / In Staub. Du bist der grosse Donnerer! / Und dein ist alles, was ich habe" [ll. 2312-14]), and is pleased to accept a son from him only because he is a god. One can scarcely conceive of his acceptance of such a "favor" from another mortal! In his eyes and the eyes of the people, a visit by Jupiter is clearly in a class by itself, for he is no less than a god.

And this is, to a great extent, Alkmene's feeling as well. When she fears that she has been deceived by another human being she reacts violently. ("Dass ihn Zeus mir zu Füssen niederstürzte!" [l. 1298]). But when she is forced for the moment to entertain the idea that it might have been Jupiter who visited her, her response assumes a totally different tone:

> Würd ich vor solchem Glanze nicht versinken?
> Würd ich, wär ers gewesen, noch das Leben
> In diesem warmen Busen freudig fühlen?
> Ich, solcher Gnad Unwürdig'? Ich, Sünderin? (ll. 1365-68)

It cannot be denied that she would prefer to remain unvisited by the god (ll. 1506-09), but if such a visit must be, her response to it it one of pious submission, not of angry despair:

> Fern sei von mir,
> Der Götter grossem Ratschluss mich zu sträuben,
> Ward ich so heilgem Amte auserkoren.
> Er, der mich schuf, er walte über mich. (ll. 1533-36)

She clearly does not prefer the god to her beloved Amphitryon, but she does at the same time reverence him as god, and cannot respond to him in violence or utter despair.

It is this same Jupiter, "der der Menschen Herzen kennt," (l. 1373) who assures Alkmene that her "unfehlbares Gefühl" has not been deceived (l. 1290). It is this same Jupiter who, when confronted with Alkmene's utter fidelity to Amphitryon, curses the delusion which had lured him to her side (l. 1512). It is this same Jupiter who, after seeing her constancy, sings his hymn of praise to Alkmene:

> Mein süsses, angebetetes Geschöpf!
> In dem so selig ich mich, selig preise!
> So urgemäss, dem göttlichen Gedanken,
> In Form und Mass, und Sait und Klang,
> Wie's meiner Hand Tonen nicht entschlüpfte! (ll. 1569-73)

Jupiter, at least, does not at any point feel that he has succeeded in subverting her love, i.e., in deceiving her "Gefühl." "Dein wartet ein Triumph. . . (l. 2271) he promises her.

But then there is Alkmene's own despairing

> O verflucht der Busen,
> Der solche falschen Töne gibt!
> Verflucht die Seele, die nicht so viel taugt,
> Um ihren eigenen Geliebten sich zu merken!
> Auf der Gebirge Gipfel will ich fliehen,
> In tote Wildnis hin, wo auch die Eule
> Mich nicht besucht, wenn mir kein Wächter ist,
> Der in Unsträflichkeit den Busen mir bewahrt.
> Geh! deine schnöde List ist dir geglückt,
> Und meiner Seele Frieden eingeknickt. (ll. 2253-62)

These lines seem to suggest that Alkmene is firmly convinced that she is without protection, that her "Gefühl" has totally failed her. However, it is of crucial importance to note that at this juncture she again is convinced that she has been deceived by a human being, and that if she knew that it was the god who had visited her, it is inconceivable that she would have spoken these lines--at least if one is to take seriously her previous "Er, der mich schuf, er walte über mich. . ." (l. 1536).

Then the moment of revelation comes; it was Jupiter who had visited her! And in the light of this knowledge her "Ohnmacht" and final "Ach!" must be seen. To see in this curt utterance merely a despairing confirmation of her suspicion that her "Gefühl" has failed her is to ignore her previous reverence for the deity and also, the tremendous complexity of her situation. It is the god, "Der Schreckliche! Er selbst. . . (l. 2311) who shows himself, and who with his appearance changes the entire complexion of what has previously occurred with such a jolt that Alkmene's initial reaction can only be one of overwhelming confusion--but "die süsse Verwirrung eines Frauenherzens," in the words of Thomas Mann,[21] and not the confusion of despair.[22] A new and godly light has been cast on all that has transpired, one which can only serve to dispel the aura of anguish and confusion, not intensify it. It is too much to expect that Alkmene react rationally to this situation, that she immediately analyze all of its implications. The drama closes instead with her infinitely more eloquent "Ach!" But one is reminded of the lines she spoke earlier in the play:

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[21]Mann, 607.

[22]Alkmene's reaction to the clarification wrought by Jupiter's self-revelation is strikingly similar to Käthchen's reaction when she learns the overwhelmingly good news that she is to become the bride of Graf von Strahl:

Alkmene: "Schützt mich, ihr Himmlischen." (Sie fällt in Amphitryons Arme). (l. 2312)

Käthchen: "Schütze mich Gott und alle Heiligen." (Sie sinkt; die Gräfin empfängt sie). (l. 2678)

It would seem that the fact that Alkmene calls for divine protection and then swoons does not in itself indicate that tragedy or despair is in evidence.

Wie gern will ich den Schmerz empfunden haben,
Den Jupiter mir zugefügt,
Bleibt mir nur alles freundlich wie es war. (ll. 1412-14)

And one cannot help but feel, in view of all that has transpired, that "alles" will remain "ihr freundlich."

But what about the knotty problem of Alkmene's "Gefühl?" Is it ultimately reliable or not? Does it deceive her? It seems to me indisputable that Alkmene does undergo a vivid experience of what it would be like to be defenseless, without the sustaining power of "Gefühl," and in this respect the comedy borders hard on tragedy. Alkmene undergoes a trial which shakes her very soul. But for all practical purposes, her "Gefühl" remains a trustworthy guide for this world; only the god, no mortal man, could deceive her--and only then by assuming the very being of the beloved one. As Jupiter asks Alkmene:

Und müssen nicht sie [die Allgegenwärtigen] selber noch,
Geliebte,
Amphitryon sein, und seine Züge stehlen,
Wenn deine Seele sie empfangen soll? (ll. 1407-09)

Then too, does Jupiter actually deceive her? Stated differently, does he really succeed in getting Alkmene to distinguish between her love for Amphitryon-Jupiter and Amphitryon? Jupiter himself does not think so. And perhaps we should follow his lead at this point.

In conclusion, Kleist depicts in Amphitryon both the power of "Gefühl" and a vision of what its loss would involve. "Gefühl" provides the sole access to truth and meaning, not seen as abstractions, but as prerequisites for purposeful action and the maintenance of personal dignity and integrity in a confusing and threatening

world. It is the rock upon which meaningful existence must be built, for it alone gives ultimate, hence religious, certainty.

Das Käthchen von Heilbronn

> Ihr Glaub ist, wie ein Turm, so fest gegründet! (Vol. I, l. 2077)

Das Käthchen von Heilbronn is unquestionably one of the least controversial of Kleist's works. With the exception of scholars like Joachim Maass, who terms the play "eine Wonnetaumel des Masochismus. . ."[23] and Friedrich Gundolf, who sees in Käthchen "das Weib in Kleist: die rasende Demut, die nur der stockigste bockigste Eigenbrödler konzipieren konnte als Wunschbild der Erlösung. . .,"[24] critics tend by and large to stress the concept of unerring "Gefühl" as central in this drama. Servaes, for example, emphasizes Käthchen's "Gefühlseinheit, Gefühlsreinheit,"[25] Witkop her "kindlichreines Gefühl,"[26] Brahm "die völlig unfehlbare Sicherheit des Gefühls,"[27] and Fricke "die triumphierende Unbedingtheit des Gefühls."[28] This rather unexpected unanimity reflects the fact that in many respects this drama is one of the least complex of Kleist's works.

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[23]Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens (Wien: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1957), 320.

[24]Friedrich Gundolf, Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1922), 115.

[25]Franz Servaes, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: Verlag von E. A. Seemann und der Gesellschaft für graphische Industrie, 1902), 109.

[26]Philipp Witkop, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1922), 161.

[27]Brahm, 280.

[28]Fricke, 155.

Käthchen von Heilbronn, ostensibly the daughter of Theobald Friedeborn, an armorer, has been shown in a dream the man whom she is to marry. One day this very man, in the figure of Graf vom Strahl, unexpectedly appears in her father's workshop. Käthchen is immediately and mysteriously drawn to him, and despite great personal hardship follows him slavishly wherever he goes. Strahl, who shared Käthchen's dream, first resents her troublesome presence, but eventually feels increasingly attracted to her. He attempts to stifle his feelings for her, and does not even consider marrying her, since she is supposedly a commoner, and the angel in his dream told him he was to marry a "Kaiserstochter." He decides instead to marry one Kunigunde von Thurneck, who is of noble stock, and thus socially and legally eligible to become his wife. But ultimately Kunigunde is unmasked as an ugly and vicious fraud, Graf Strahl discovers that Käthchen is of royal birth, that she is in fact the maiden shown him in his dream, and the two of them marry and, as in Der Zweikampf, presumably live happily ever after.

Käthchen's situation obviously is somewhat different from that of Alkmene. Käthchen simply follows the voice from within, and never is led to doubt its guidance. Although she does grieve because of the anguish her actions cause her father, Theobald Friedeborn, and even resolves to return to him, she does not at any point question the dictates of her inner "Gefühl." Perhaps the reason for this is that she lives so immediately and spontaneously and unreflectively that she cannot even identify the force which directs her action. Thus when Graf vom Strahl interrogates her during the

session of the "Vehmgericht":

> Was ists, mit einem Wort, mir rund gesagt,
> Das dich aus deines Vaters Hause trieb?
> Was fesselt dich an meine Schritte an? (ll. 457-459)

Käthchen can only answer:

> Mein hoher Herr! Da fragst du mich zuviel.
> Und läg ich so, wie ich vor dir jetzt liege,
> Vor meinem eigenen Bewusstsein da:
> Auf einem goldnen Richtstuhl lass es thronen,
> Und alle Schrecken des Gewissens ihm,
> In Flammenrüstungen, zur Seite stehn;
> So spräche jeglicher Gedanke noch,
> Auf das, was du gefragt: ich weiss es nicht. (ll. 460-467)

Upon recovering from her fall, as related in the first act of the play, she "schnürt ihr Bündel, und tritt, beim Strahl der Morgensonne, in die Tür: wohin? fragt sie die Magd; zum Grafen Wetter vom Strahl, antwortet sie, und verschwindet" (ll. 197-200)--without further explanation, for as far as she is concerned, none is required. She does not share Kleist's tormented questioning as to "was der Himmel mit uns will," for she is in total harmony with the Divine Will. In the words of Fricke: "Käthchen . . . folgt ihrem reinen Gefühl und ist eben dadurch in Uebereinstimmung mit Gott."[29] The appearance of the guardian angel who rescues her from the burning castle in Act III represents, it seems to me, visible evidence of the divine benediction upon her life and actions.

A few critics have pointed to the fairy-tale atmosphere prevailing in parts of the drama and have inferred from it the supposed realization on Kleist's part that it is impossible to live out of the immediate certainty of "Gefühl" in the real world, that such a life is possible only in the Märchen. Thus the comment of Willige, who sees in the play "ein Märchenwunder": "Wie gläubig

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[29]Fricke, 155.

Kleist dieses Menschideal in sich hegte, noch sah er keinen rechten Weg zu seiner Verwirklichung, noch war es ihm wie ein Traum, dem er nur als Dichter ein freilich höchst überzeugendes Leben verleihen könne."[30] Blankenagel writes in a similar vein: Käthchen's unity and harmony, he is convinced, do not exist in the world of everyday reality, and Kleist knows it. "And thus, underlying this happy state of unconscious bliss and natural innocence, there is Kleist's tragic recognition that such perfect accord and harmony are not of this world. Käthchen represents a compensatory rather than an expressive idea."[31] And again, "It makes its fresh, youthful appeal to the theater-goer who can . . . enter into the world of the fanciful."[32] Walter Silz apparently concurs in this judgment: "Only in this fairy world is harmony of soul possible; so far must we come from reality to find happiness," he writes.[33] Kleist, according to Silz, "knew only too well that the experience of Käthchen does not correspond to that of everyday life. . . . He knew that he had not solved the problem of individual existence."[34]

There is a measure of truth in these judgments. Maybe "such perfect (italics mine) accord and harmony are not of this world,"

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[30]Wilhelm Willige, Klassische Gestaltung und romantischer Einfluss in den Dramen Heinrichs von Kleist. (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1915), 73.

[31]John Blankenagel, The Dramas of Heinrich von Kleist (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 156.

[32]Blankenagel, Dramas of Kleist, 174.

[33]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist's Conception of the Tragic (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 57.

[34]Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 58.

as Blankenagel claims. But to accept Silz's assertion that this drama contains Kleist's tacit admission that "only in this fairy world is harmony of soul possible" is to ignore the testimony of other works of Kleist. The Marquise von O . . ., to cite but one Kleistian figure, lives in a dreadfully real world, and ultimately, through reliance upon her "innerstes Gefühl," achieves both "harmony of soul" and "happiness." Both are won after terrible struggle, but they are nonetheless won. It seems to me that the account of her predicament and ultimate victory furnishes indisputably concrete proof of the feasibility of realizing in the here and now the ideal to which Willige refers.

Furthermore, even if this were the only creative work Kleist ever wrote, and it were impossible to appeal to other dramas or Novellen, it would still be unwarranted to infer on the basis of its Märchenton and supernatural elements that Kleist adjudges the ideal it espouses to be admittedly irrelevant for this world, or even impossible of fulfillment in reality as we know it. The insight and message of the drama are clear and positive--and earnestly meant to illuminate this life, to point the way in the here and now. To read a mood of resignation or of withdrawal from concrete existence into the drama simply because its world does not totally correspond to the "real" world is at best dubious critical procedure.

Thus in Das Käthchen von Heilbronn existential religious certainty is derived once again from reliance upon "Gefühl," from contact with the ultimate authority, with the divine Ground, as some critics term it. The reliability of "Gefühl" is not seriously

challenged, at least not within Käthchen herself, but is simply and unconditionally accepted. Eventually Graf vom Strahl too becomes a believer, but not until his more reasonable approach to his problem nearly leads him to a grotesquely unfortunate marriage. But all ends well, once he too learns that "Wissenschaft, entschöpft dem Himmelsbronnen," (l. 2367) is imparted only to those who are willing to abandon their rational prejudices and to listen instead to the angels.

Die Marquise von O . . .

> Durch diese schöne Anstrengung mit sich selbst bekannt gemacht, hob sie sich plötzlich, wie an ihrer eigenen Hand, aus der ganzen Tiefe, in welche das Schicksal sie herabgestürzt hatte, empor. (II, 126)

In this Novelle the Marquise of O . . ., a young widowed mother of two children, finds herself, in typical Kleistian fashion, in a totally incomprehensible and threatening situation. Although since the death of her husband she has conducted herself unimpeachably, she suddenly and inexplicably finds herself to be with child. This state of affairs naturally causes her violent consternation, and also results in her parents rejecting her and her father demanding that she relinquish the custody of her two children to him. At this point the Marquise, who previously has been well nigh overcome with fear and trembling, suddenly gains strength and courage, defiantly refuses to be deprived of her children, and moves to her country estate. Here she lives in solitude, awaiting the birth of the child whom she has come to accept as a gift of God. Ultimately

the Marquise's innocence is established and the child's father, a Russian military officer, comes forward. She agrees to marry him, but not until he fully redeems himself will she allow him to assume his place as husband and father. A second wedding is then celebrated, "froher als die erste," and "eine ganze Reihe von jungen Russen folgte jetzt noch dem ersten. . . ."

Of particular interest in this study is the sudden transformation of the Marquise from a baffled, trembling, fearful creature to a strong, self-assured and heroic woman who is able to maintain her dignity and personal integrity in the face of the "unerklärliche Einrichtung der Welt" (II, 126). Kleist himself describes her transformation in these words:

> Durch diese schöne Anstrengung mit sich selbst bekannt gemacht [i.e., her defiant refusal to give up her children], hob sie sich plötzlich, wie an ihrer eigenen Hand, aus der ganzen Tiefe, in welche das Schicksal sie herabgestürzt hatte, empor. Der Aufruhr, der ihre Brust zerriss, legte sich, als sie im Freien war, sie küsste häufig die Kinder, diese ihre liebe Beute, und mit grosser Selbstzufriedenheit gedachte sie, welch einen Sieg sie, durch die Kraft ihres schuldfreien Bewusstseins, über ihren Bruder davon getragen hatte. Ihr Verstand, stark genug, in ihrer sonderbaren Lage nicht zu reissen, gab sich ganz unter der grossen, heiligen und unerklärlichen Einrichtung der Welt gefangen. Sie sah die Unmöglichkeit ein, ihre Familie von ihrer Unschuld zu überzeugen, begriff, dass sie sich darüber trösten müsse, falls sie nicht untergehen wolle, und wenige Tage nur waren nach ihrer Ankunft in V. . . verflossen, als der Schmerz ganz und gar dem heldenmütigen Vorsatz Platz machte, sich mit Stolz gegen die Anfälle der Welt zu rüsten. Sie beschloss, sich ganz in ihr Innerstes zurückzuziehen, sich, mit ausschliessendem Eifer, der Erziehung ihrer beiden Kinder zu widmen, und des Geschenks, das ihr Gott mit dem dritten gemacht hatte, mit voller mütterlichen Liebe zu pflegen (II, 126).

Many critics interpret this transformation as the result of her discovery of the ultimate, all-sustaining power of "Gefühl." "Nun spürt sie plötzlich, wie inmitten der verwirrenden Endlichkeit

eines ewig und unzerstörbar in ihr lebt: die unzerstörbare Einheit mit sich selbst und mit Gott in der heiligen Gewissheit des reinen Gefühls,--und spürt, wie dieses Gefühl sie trägt. . ."[35] writes Gerhard Fricke. Günter Blöcker advances a similar view, terming the Novelle "eine Beatifizierung des Gefühls."[36] Even Walter Müller-Seidel, who is wary of overemphasis on "die Verherrlichung des Gefühls" writes: "Die Herrlichkeit ihres Gefühls wird gerühmt, und mit Recht. Wie sie spontan ihre Kinder ergreift und das Haus der Eltern verlässt, ist Ausdruck einer Unmittelbarkeit des Gefühls, durch die sie sich aus ihrer Umwelt deutlich genug heraushebt."[37]

It is immediately obvious that Kleist himself does not use the word "Gefühl" in the passage quoted above. Friedrich Koch takes great pains to emphasize this fact, noting that at key junctures in the Novelle the word "Bewusstsein" is employed--not "Gefühl." The word "Gefühl," when used in this Novelle, has reference only to physical feelings or sensations, he claims.[38] Thus Koch rejects the contention that the Marquise triumphs by virtue of her reliance upon "Gefühl."[39] She actually finds herself, he asserts, in her "Hingabe für ihre Kinder." Koch, capitalizing on the use of the term "Bewusstsein," goes on to interpret the Novelle in terms of the conflict between "Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit"--which he finds to be the universal Kleistian theme.[40]

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[35]Fricke, 138.

[36]Blöcker, 177.

[37]Walter Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen: Eine Studie über Heinrich von Kleist (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1961), 198.

[38]Koch, 37.

[39]Koch, 107.

[40]Koch, 45.

The first element in Koch's argument which requires attention centers about his concept of the roles played by "Gefühl" and "Bewusstsein" in this Novelle:

> Erst von Amphitryon an spielt das Wort "Gefühl" jene Rolle, die ihm Fricke für das Gesamtwerk zuspricht. In der Marquise von O . . . erscheint es nur in der Bedeutung des rein körperlichen Gefühls, z. B. wenn die Marquise sagt: "Hab ich nicht mein eignes, innerliches, mir nur allzuwohlbekanntes Gefühl gegen mich?", und später die Mutter "Kann ein innerliches Gefühl denn . . . nicht trügen?" Im übrigen ist hier von Bewusstsein die Rede.[41]

To begin with, it is simply untrue that in this particular work Kleist uses the word "Gefühl" only in reference to physical feelings ("das rein körperliche Gefühl"). Take, for example, his depiction of the Marquise's inner struggle as to whether or not she should publish the advertisement requesting the father of her unborn child to step forward: "Durch ganze Nächte, in unruhiger Schlaflosigkeit durchwacht, ward es gedreht und gewendet um sich an seine ihr innerstes Gefühl verletzende, Natur zu gewöhnen" (II, 127). "Gefühl" as used here obviously does not refer to physical sensation; indeed, it closely approximates in meaning the concept of "Gefühl" as understood by critics like Blöcker and Fricke--quite contrary to Koch's assertions.

Then too, the absence of the specific term "Gefühl" does not necessarily mean the absence of the phenomenon commonly associated with that term in Kleist's works. Stated more explicitly, the use of the word "Bewusstsein" need not imply the introduction of a concept totally distinct from "Gefühl" as understood by Blöcker, who in his discussion of Die Marquise von O . . . focuses directly on this specific issue. "Wie alles andere ist auf dem realistischen Boden

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[41]Koch, 37.

der Novelle auch das heilige Wort "Gefühl" verdinglicht; es gibt seine höheren Ausdruckskräfte an ein anderes ab: Bewusstsein,"[42] he writes. And later in the same paragraph:

> Unbeirrbarkeit des Gefühls, auch wenn es nicht ausdrücklich so benannt wird, bedeutet hier die Fähigkeit, in der härtesten Prüfung bis zur Anspannung der letzten seelischen Kräfte auszuharren, bedeutet Selbstgewissheit und Bewusstsein des inneren Wertes, ist die wunderbare Sicherheit des Seins, der der Mensch sich ohne Vorbehalt überlässt. Das Gefühl hat hier weltheiligende Kraft.[43]

And Blöcker is, in my opinion, substantially correct at this point.

A third aspect of Koch's argument, one which is intended specifically as a refutation of Fricke, is, frankly, puzzling. He argues:

> Wenn Fricke behauptet, das Ich vermöge das rätselhafte und vernichtende Schicksal zu überwinden, ohne an dem Widerspruch zwischen der Wirklichkeit und der bewahrten Reinheit des Gefühls zugrunde zu gehen, so ist hier gerade das Gegenteil ausgesprochen: dieser Widerspruch ist vernichtend. Von Einheit des Ichs mit sich selber kann hier keine Rede sein.[44]

"Dieser Widerspruch ist vernichtend," Koch insists, but surely Fricke, and even more importantly, the Novelle itself, emphasize the <u>overcoming</u> of tragedy through the discovery of a new source of inner strength. It cannot be denied that her predicament causes the Marquise terrible anguish, but it is because she makes contact with this previously untapped but eternally present <u>Kraftquelle</u> that her anguish is only temporary. It does not determine the course of her future action, and obviously has not annihilated her. She has become "mit sich selbst bekannt," with all that the phrase implies, and her newly found resolution stems from her contact with

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[42]Blöcker, 176.

[43]Blöcker, 176.

[44]Koch, 107.

the eternal Ground of her being. Koch's comments on this issue appear to be rather pointless and constitute a simple failure to attend to the text.

One final element in Koch's interpretation of this Novelle appears questionable, namely, his insistence that the Marquise overcomes not through reliance upon "Gefühl," but because her children give her life meaning. Now of course it is true, as Koch argues, that the Marquise's initial defiance of her father "hat nicht sehr viel zu tun mit der 'heiligen Gewissheit des reinen Gefühls.'"[45] She is indeed instilled with the "Mut der Verzweiflung," to use Koch's terms, when she as mother refuses to relinquish the custody of her children. But this is only the beginning of things; in the process of asserting her rights to her children she is made aware of the eternal source of strength and existential truth lying deep within, and it is reliance upon this source which enables her to triumph in the diverse trials which yet await her. The courage born of despair which she manifests in this episode is not the final, ultimate step in her self-discovery, but instead leads to, or is the occasion for the discovery of that Kraftquelle which is to sustain her to the very end. And in retreating to her "Innerstes" she derives the strength to raise her family and maintain her self-respect. Thus, to say that she overcomes only because her children give her life meaning is to state at best a very small part of the truth. It would be more accurate to say that she is able to serve her family and maintain herself because, as Blöcker puts it, "das Gefühl hat hier weltheiligende Kraft."[46]

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[45]Koch, 107.

[46]Blöcker, 176.

The Marquise' ultimate stance in an inexplicable and potentially menacing world is one of pious acceptance. "Ihr Verstand, stark genug, in ihrer sonderbaren Lage nicht zu reissen, gab sich ganz unter der grossen, heiligen und unerklärlichen Einrichtung der Welt gefangen" (II, 126). She has made her peace with the world, a peace not based upon a rational comprehension of things, but grounded instead upon a firm source of inner strength. Fricke is right; her newly found "Kraft" is "unerklärbar aus ihrem bloss empirisch-psychologischen Dasein."[47] It proceeds from the eternal, from God. But it can be apprehended only through "Gefühl," only by delving deep within, by becoming "mit sich selbst bekannt." The Marquise's search for peace does not constrain her to prayer, as commonly understood, to conscious communication with a personal God who is totally involved in, yet distinct from and superior to human existence. Kleist's quest for the eternal takes the way nach Innen. His search for meaning is directed only to the "within," to the Ultimate as it resides in the soul. And since we are concerned in this study with Kleist's religion it is important to emphasize that in its exclusive concentration on this internal dimension it is, seen from the orthodox Christian perspective, at best partial and incomplete.

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[47]Fricke, 138.

Penthesilea

> Das ist ihr Schicksal!
> Dir scheinen Eisenbanden
> unzerreissbar,
> Nicht wahr? Nun sieh: sie bräche
> sie vielleicht,
> Und das Gefühl doch nicht, das
> du verspottest.
> (ll. 1281-1284)

In the four works discussed thus far the nature of "Gefühl" and its reliability as a source of existential religious certainty and strength are depicted with relative clarity. As one proceeds to an examination of such works as Penthesilea and Der Prinz von Homburg, however, the way becomes more difficult to follow. One is confronted with the basic question of whether or not the concept of "Gefühl" is central in these works too. And if so, is it portrayed in basically positive tones, or is it shown to be untrustworthy--and even destructive? Or does one perhaps do gross violence to Kleist's intent and the text of his works by attempting to interpret them in terms of "Gefühl" as a basically religious phenomenon? Would it perhaps be more fruitful to view the central problem in at least some of these remaining works as a psychological problem and not as an existential religious problem? The answers to such questions are very elusive and, in some cases, quite complex.

Thus there is, for example, the case of Penthesilea, a tragedy dating back to 1807, the year of Kleist's imprisonment in France. The fact that over the years Kleist scholars have advocated such a great variety of approaches to this drama seems to suggest that it is perhaps one of the most baffling of all of his works. As Gerhard Fricke puts it: "Noch verwirrender, wenn es möglich ist, als bei

dem Amphitryon sind die zahllosen Versuche sich des Sinnes der Penthesilea zu bemächtigen. . . ."[48] A short review of a number of interpretations of Penthesilea will serve to demonstrate the validity of Fricke's comment.

Wilbrandt,[49] Gundolf,[50] and Eloesser,[51] for example, see this play as an intensely personal expression of Kleist's own "Art des Seins"[52]--including above all the allegedly pathological elements in his makeup. Witkop, on the other hand, emphasizes the conflict between "dem dionysischen Gesetz der Liebe und dem apollinischen der Persönlichkeit. . ."[53] in this drama, while March stresses its "terrifying presentation of female sexuality."[54] "The primitive erotic impulse," he writes, ". . . had never yet been portrayed dramatically in all its ambivalence, subtlety and strangeness, with such uncompromising frankness."[55] Meyer-Benfey terms Penthesilea a psychological drama, and, much like Blankenagel,[56] sees its conflict in terms of the struggle between Penthesilea the Amazon and

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[48]Fricke, 97.

[49]Adolf Wilbrandt, Heinrich von Kleist (Nördlingen: Druck und Verlag der C. H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1863), 262-264.

[50]Gundolf, 90-91.

[51]Arthur Eloesser, Heinrich von Kleist, eine Studie ("Die Literatur," Vol. XVI; Berlin: Bard Marquardt et Co., 1904), 50-51.

[52]Gundolf, 91.

[53]Witkop, 134.

[54]Richard March, Heinrich von Kleist ("Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought"; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 33.

[55]March, 34.

[56]Blankenagel, Dramas of Kleist, 133.

Penthesilea the loving woman.[57] Stahl's conviction that "the deeper causes of Penthesilea's tragedy [are] her love for Achilles and the allegiance which she owes to the god Mars"[58] resembles the view of Meyer-Benfey, although Stahl's emphasis on the god as "a superior external power" gives his interpretation a slightly different focus.

Many critics, of course, center their interpretations of an analysis of the role of "Gefühl" in this drama. Servaes, for example, terms Penthesilea a "Gefühlstragödie,"[59] and Silz refers to it as "a tragedy of the conflict of feeling."[60] But even the scholars who emphasize the significance of "Gefühl" in this play disagree markedly with each other. Fricke predictably sees in Penthesilea a triumph of eternal "Gefühl,"[61] while Koch insists that the drama demonstrates, among other things, that absolute "Gefühl" leads to "Entmenschlichung,"[62] and Blöcker states that "Penthesilea ist die Tragödie eines Gefühls, das nicht in sich hineinhorcht, um so vielleicht die Stimme Gottes zu verhehmen, sondern das selber Gott zu sein meint. Es setzt sich absolut, statt sich, wie das in den gefühlsverherrlichenden Gestalten Kleists der Fall ist, instrumental zu nehmen."[63] And each critic appears to be convinced of the exclusive validity of his own particular interpretation.

Although Kleist himself does not provide an extensive commentary on Penthesilea, two of his letters do contain helpful and

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[57]Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, Kleists Leben und Werke (Göttingen: Otto Hapke Verlag, 1911), 193.

[58]Stahl, 76. [59]Servaes, 90.

[60]Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 43.

[61]Fricke, 121. [62]Koch, 159. [63]Blöcker, 181.

interesting remarks on the close kinship of Penthesilea to Käthchen. "Jetzt bin ich nur neugierig," he writes to Marie von Kleist, "was Sie zu dem Käthchen von Heilbronn sagen werden, denn das ist die Kehrseite der Penthesilea, ihr andrer Pol, ein Wesen, das ebenso mächtig ist durch gänzliche Hingebung, als jene durch Handeln" (II, 797). And to Heinrich Joseph von Collin: "Denn wer das Käthchen liebt, dem kann die Penthesilea nicht ganz unbegreiflich sein, sie gehören ja wie das + und - der Algebra zusammen, und sind ein und dasselbe Wesen, nur unter entgegengesetzten Beziehungen gedacht" (II, 818).

Just how are these comments of Kleist to be understood? The essential consideration, it seems to me, is that both of these figures live out of the immediacy of "Gefühl," and in that sense are "ein und dasselbe Wesen." Neither of them is initially fully conscious of the force dictating her actions; neither of them knows precisely why she is compelled to follow the man to whom she is so powerfully attracted. Each only knows that she must do what she is doing, and that no exterior force or human tie can serve to supplant or alter the inviolable primacy of her ultimate existential allegiance which is grounded deep within. In the words of Penthesilea herself:

> Lass mich:
> Du hörst, was ich beschloss, eh würdest du
> Den Strom, wenn er herab von Bergen schiesst,
> Als meiner Seele Donnersturz regieren. (ll. 635-38)

Her pursuit of Achilles, as she later confesses, is literally a matter of life and death:

> Doch von zwei Dingen schnell beschloss ich eines,
> Dich zu gewinnen, oder umzukommen. . . . (ll. 2220-21)

It is not simply that Penthesilea "falls in love" with Achilles,

or that she merely feels a strong sexual attraction to him. The establishment of a vital I-thou relationship to Achilles is an absolute prerequisite of her very existence, is an incontrovertible demand of her "ewiges, heiliges Ich."[64]

The high priestess represents a point of view, an orientation totally alien to that of Penthesilea. She can neither understand nor appreciate a perspective which ignores the alleged common good as prescribed by her formal religion in favor of the rights of the Ich, of "Gefühl," which are so intensely personal in nature.

> Was geht dem Volke der Pelide an?
> --Ziemts einer Tochter Ares', Königin,
> Im Kampf auf einen Namen sich zu stellen?
> . . . . . .
> Ward solch ein Wahsinn jemals noch erhört! (ll. 1044-46, 54)

The demands of the Ich, the newly-discovered core of Penthesilea's existence, are to the high priestess "der Feind in ihrem Busen," (l. 1108) emanating from "ihr töricht Herz" (l. 1281). The high priestess takes her orders from an exterior force, she speaks "in meiner Göttin Namen," (l. 1048) and sees Penthesilea not as a person with inviolable rights, but only as "die Führerin des Diamantengürtels," (l. 1083) as agent of that same force.

But Prothoe knows better. It is not objective law, not codified religious or civil statute which is the ultimate inviolable determinative in Penthesilea. In answer to the high priestess she states:

> Dir scheinen Eisenbanden unzerreissbar,
> Nicht wahr? Nun sieh: sie bräche sie vielleicht,
> Und das Gefühl doch nicht, das du verspottest,

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[64]Fricke, 122.

> Was in ihr walten mag, das weiss nur sie,
> Und jeder Busen ist, der fühlt, ein Rätsel.
> Sie streift', ergriff es schon: die Hand versagt ihr,
> Nach einem andern noch sich auszustrecken.--
> (ll. 1282-89)

And even as Penthesilea lives by the internal, existential law of her totally unique being, her Ich, her "Gefühl," so she chooses also to die by it.

> Denn jetzt steig ich in meinen Busen nieder,
> Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz,
> Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor.
> Dies Erz, dies läutr' ich in der Glut des Jammers
> Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk es mit Gift sodann,
> Heissätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch;
> Trag es der Hoffnung ewgem Amboss zu,
> Und schärf und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch:
> Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust:
> So! So! So! So! Und wieder!--Nun ists gut.
> (ll. 3025-34)

Kleist terms Penthesilea a tragedy. The heroine dies, but in her death she only affirms the rights of "Gefühl"--she does not deny them. Fricke, I am convinced, is right when he maintains that "der Tod, den sie, nun 'ganz reif' stirbt, ist nicht Schrecken, sondern Seligkeit, ist der Triumph des ewigen Gefühls. . . ."[65] Penthesilea has remained true to her Lebensprinzip to the very end and in the very end. To accept the divine forgiveness profferred by the high priestess and to resume her old function in the Amazon state would be to deny the power by which she has lived. And this she cannot do. Prothoe understands, when she comments: "Wohl ihr! Denn hier war ihres fernern Bleibens nicht" (ll. 3035-36).

To see in this drama a conflict between the woman and the queen in Penthesilea, or between Natur und Unnatur may indeed be helpful, but the ultimate conflict takes place on a far deeper level.

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[65]Fricke, 121.

It is the conflict between two Lebensgefühle, two religions. Penthesilea must decide whether to live--and die--by universal norms whose sacredness is derived from "out there," or to find meaning by living in fidelity to the unique, interior law of the Ich which communicates itself through "Gefühl," and which is imbued with a sacredness all its own. It is this latter way which she chooses.

Der Prinz von Homburg

> --Inzwischen, wenn du deinem
> Herzen folgst,
> Ists mir erlaubt, dem meinigen
> zu folgen.
> (ll. 1389-90)

In the opening scene in act three of Kleist's Prinz von Homburg, Hohenzollern is visiting Homburg in prison. Homburg has learned of the verdict rendered by the court martial in his case, but steadfastly refuses to believe that the Elector of Brandenburg, acting in accordance with the directive of the court, will permit his execution. When Hohenzollern questions him: "Und worauf stützt sich deine Sicherheit?" (l. 867) Homburg simply answers: "Auf mein Gefühl von ihm" (l. 868). Up to this point in the drama, at least, Homburg appears to have the Kleistian faith that can move mountains. Despite every indication that the death sentence is indeed to be carried out, he confidently and calmly awaits his pardon. And his confidence is grounded upon intuitive certainty, "auf mein Gefühl von ihm." Here, it seems, is the flesh and blood realization of Friedrich von Trota's injunction to Littegarde in Der Zweikampf: "Türme das Gefühl, das in deiner Brust lebt, wie einen Felsen empor: halte dich daran und wanke nicht, und wenn Erd und Himmel unter dir

und über dir zu Grunde gingen!" (II, pp. 253-54).

But it so happens that the Elector fully intends, according to all appearances, to sign the death-warrant, thus seemingly giving the lie to Homburg's "Gefühl von ihm." And when Homburg begins to realize this, when he sees the very grave which has been dug for him, his confidence becomes trembling fear. The proud victor in the battle of Fehrbellin is reduced to an abject beggar, pleading ingloriously for an extension of his physical existence:

> Seit ich mein Grab sah, will ich nichts, als leben,
> Und frage nichts mehr, ob es rühmlich sei. (ll. 1003-04)

And again:

> Ich will auf meine Güter gehn am Rhein,
> Da will ich bauen, will ich niederreissen,
> Dass mir der Schweiss herabtrieft, säen, ernten,
> Als wärs für Weib und Kind, allein geniessen,
> Und, wenn ich erntete, von neuem säen,
> Und in den Kreis herum das Leben jagen,
> Bis es am Abend niedersinkt und stirbt. (ll. 1030-36)

He even relinquishes his claim upon Natalie, who was destined to become his wife, and in a gesture of grandiloquent self-pity recommends that she enter a convent, and that she

> . . . such in den Bergen
> Dir einen Knaben, blondgelockt wie ich,
> Kauf ihn mit Gold und Silber dir, drück ihn
> An deine Brust und lehr ihn: Mutter! stammeln,
> Und wenn er grösser ist, so unterweis ihn,
> Wie man den Sterbenden die Augen schliesst. (ll. 1046-51)

In the words of Natalie, who despite all this remains nobly true to him:

> Zu solchem Elend, glaubt ich, sänke keiner,
> Den die Geschicht' als ihren Helden preist. (ll. 1167-68)

But what has happened to Homburg's "Gefühl?" Is Kleist in some way qualifying his earlier "Evangelium des Gefühls." Or has

he in the years of fuller maturity come to the conclusion that "Gefühl" is in fact an unsure guide, that it does not ultimately give meaning and certainty? In an attempt to answer these questions it is necessary to discuss Homburg's orientation prior to the conflict, his behavior during the time of his deepest stress, and his orientation after the conflict has been resolved.

When Kottwitz in the heat of battle attempts to restrain Homburg, to prevent him from attacking prematurely and thus violating the express command of the Elector, Homburg answers:

> Auf Ordr'! Ei, Kottwitz! Reitest du so langsam?
> Hast du sie noch vom Herzen nicht empfangen!
> (ll. 474-75)

These lines contain a concise statement of Homburg's initial orientation. This does not mean that he can simply be termed a romantic dreamer inclined to lyric ecstasies, although this is doubtlessly one aspect of his make-up. What it does mean is that the dynamic not only of his dreaming, but also of his action is rooted within. It means that any other stimulus to action or criterion for judgment is of no more than secondary value. The attack orders issued by the heart take precedence over those of the formal military hierarchy (l. 474). The dictates of the heart, in Homburg's opinion, are unquestionably superior to those of "Pflicht."

> Der Kurfürst hat getan, was Pflicht erheischte,
> Und nun wird er dem Herzen auch gehorchen, (ll. 820-21)

he confidently affirms. The demands of the law must give way to the impulses of love.

> Das Kriegsrecht musste auf den Tod erkennen;
> So lautet das Gesetz, nach dem es richtet.
> Doch eh er solch ein Urteil lässt vollstrecken,
> Eh er dies Herz hier, das getreu ihn liebt,
> Auf eines Tuches Wink, der Kugel preis gibt,

Eh sieh, eh öffnet er die eigne Brust sich,
Und sprützt sein Blut selbst tropfenweis in Staub.
(ll. 870-76)

Because the demands of the law are so clearly secondary, their violation constitutes no more than a defect of minute proportions, "der Brille kaum bemerkbar" (l. 899). And as was noted above, reality itself is to be interpreted from the perspective of "Gefühl"--all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Every contour of Homburg's world is defined by the perspective of "Gefühl," "vom Herzen."

Then the catastrophe occurs, and all of the prince's certainty, poise and equanimity evaporate. Only the quivering physical shell of Homburg remains, and the primitive urge to stay alive--at all costs. Previously so vibrantly alive to life's challenges, he now is possessed by "diese tierische Gier der Endlichkeit nach sich selber."[66] The confidence of "Gefühl" is gone. The moral foundations of his existence appear to have washed away--totally.

Then comes the third stage in his development. When confronted with the challenge of deciding his own fate, of passing judgment on the justice of the Elector's decision, he experiences a kind of re-birth. The continuation of his physical existence suddenly is set into a new perspective, and new moral values become determinative for his actions: "Er handle, wie er darf;/Mir ziemt's hier zu verfahren, wie ich soll!" (ll. 1374-75) he insists. His response to the Elector's note is one of dignity and genuine nobility of spirit:

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[66]Fricke, 183.

Ich will ihm, der so würdig vor mir steht,
Nicht, ein Unwürdiger, gegenüber stehn. (ll. 1380-81)

For the first time he acknowledges the significance of his own guilt. Not only does he accept death; he affirms it.

Ruhig! Es ist mein unbeugsamer Wille!
Ich will das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs,
Das ich verletzt', im Angesicht des Heers,
Durch einen freien Tod verherrlichen!
Was kann der Sieg euch, meine Brüder, gelten,
Der eine, dürftige, den ich vielleicht
Dem Wrangel noch entreisse, dem Triumph
Verglichen, über den verderblichsten
Der Feind' in uns, den Trotz, den Uebermut,
Errungen glorreich morgen? (ll. 1749-58)

And having found himself, and thus peace with the world, Homburg has his vision of the shining immortality beckoning him.

Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein!
Du strahlst mir, durch die Binde meiner Augen,
Mit Glanz der tausendfachen Sonne zu!
Es wachsen Flügel mir an beiden Schultern,
Durch stille Aetherräume schwingt mein Geist;
Und wie ein Schiff, vom Hauch des Winds entführt,
Die muntre Hafenstadt versinken sieht,
So geht mir dämmernd alles Leben unter:
Jetzt unterscheid ich Farben noch und Formen,
Und jetzt liegt Nebel alles unter mir. (ll. 1830-39)

Obviously, the prince's initial posture is inadequate, is deficient. It disparages the sanctity and validity of law, it blinds him to the prominence of his own guilt, it disregards the rights of other individuals and the community, and ultimately, when destruction threatens, it totally fails to sustain him. In New Testament terms, he has built his house upon the sand, and the wind and rain beating upon that house destroy it. The "Gefühl" which serves as his guiding star lacks moral validity, and is of necessity doomed to crumble.

Critics diagnose the shortcomings of this "Gefühl," and thus of the prince, in various ways. It is E. L. Stahl's contention

that the Homburg whom we meet early in the play is culpable because of his basic selfishness.[67] Rudolf Ibel sees Homburg's initial "Gefühl" as defective because it lacks metaphysical foundation, and is grounded instead only on personal ties to the elector.[68] Otto Brahm censures the prince's early stance because it is, in his opinion, dominated by "Herz" and ignores "die Gebote der Disziplin."[69] And Richard March[70] and John Blankenagel,[71] much like Stahl, see in the prince's early behavior the domination of personal feeling over the claims of society. Despite this diversity of opinion, there is one point at which all of these scholars agree: namely, that Kleist does not portray the earlier "Gefühl" of the prince in positive terms. Homburg's initial orientation is clearly one which must be overcome.

But this does not mean that Kleist is discarding reliance upon "Gefühl" as the ultimate source of certainty and meaningful existence. Natalie herself does not see the prince's turnabout merely as the result of some sudden insight into the validity of legal propositions or the rights of the community. She sees instead in his response to the Elector's letter fidelity to the heart, to the interior principle, thus to "Gefühl." In her own words:

> --Inzwischen, wenn du deinem Herzen folgst,
> Ists mir erlaubt, dem meinigen zu folgen. (11. 1389090)

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[67]Stahl, 108.

[68]Rudolf Ibel, Heinrich von Kleist--Schicksal und Botschaft (Hamburg: Holsten Verlag, 1961), 104.

[69]Brahm, 358.

[70]March, 46.

[71]Blankenagel, Dramas of Kleist, 214.

But the "Gefühl," the inner principle of action which is now at work bears but little resemblance to the "Gefühl" seen in acts one and two, for it has been given a firm moral foundation, it has come into contact with the eternal Ground of its being. Now, for the first time, his house is built upon the rock.

Furthermore, as the critics insist, it is the Elector's Vertrauen which forms the basis of and prerequisite for Homburg's conversion. Even after learning of the depths to which he has sunk, the Elector affirms his confidence in Homburg:

> Die höchste Achtung, wie dir wohl bekannt,
> Trag ich im Innersten für sein Gefühl. (ll. 1183-84)

That is to say, the Elector himself, in refusing to be misled by the evidence of Homburg's collapse, lives and acts by the "Gefühl" which is the voice of the genuine Ich, with roots in the eternal. And in so doing he stimulates the prince to live and act the same way. Homburg too sees that ultimate reality and ultimate truth can only be attained by penetration to their source--the Ich, the ultimate divine Source.

The prince's comments in act five serve to corroborate this view. The lines he speaks do not indicate first of all a grudging rational acceptance of the validity of the Prussian legal code, but reflect instead contact with the "bebende Stimme der Wahrheit" of which Blöcker speaks. He has come to know his true self, and in knowing it also knows his guilt, his obligations, and his destiny. His superficial, self-centered Ich has been overcome, and a new man has emerged, one who has contact with the ultimate Ground of his being. Thus eternity opens up, an eternity in essence one with time, yet at the same moment transcending time. Put in Christian terms,

because he knows God, he can enjoy heaven while yet on earth. And death becomes a doorway, not a barrier.

It is no doubt possible to describe the change which takes place in Homburg in a number of ways, just as the critics have done and continue to do. But basic to the changes which did occur is his discovery of the real Ich, the transcendental Ich, in Fricke's words, and obedience to its voice. Kleist has not altered the essence of his message. It is not first of all his intention to point to the necessity of recognizing the rights of the state or of other individuals. Instead he points to that source of truth which alone allows for the establishment of the state and promotes meaningful life in society. He points to the basic issue as he sees it, to the ultimate reality of the transcendental Ich, whose oracle is "Gefühl." And the Prinz von Homburg relates the discovery of that Ich, and the new life resulting from that discovery.

Michael Kohlhaas

> Und mitten durch den Schmerz, die Welt in einer so ungeheuren Unordnung zu erblicken, zuckte die innerliche Zufriedenheit empor, seine eigne Brust nunmehr in Ordnung zu sehen. (II, 24)

No single work of Kleist reveals more about his basic religious orientation and his relationship to Christianity than does Michael Kohlhaas, for in no other work are the lines as clearly drawn as they are in this Novelle. Here we see Kohlhaas, a thoroughly Kleistian figure, directly confronted with one of the central demands of the Christian gospel, a demand to which he cannot accede,

and with the revered leader of the institutional church, Martin Luther, whose admonitions he cannot heed. An analysis of Kohlhaas' reaction to Luther and the message he proclaims yields decisive insight into the fundamentals of Kleist's religion.

The opening pages of the Novelle contain a clear statement of the principle of judgment and action governing Kohlhaas. When tempted to respond with violence to the insults of the Schlossvogt he restrains himself, for "er war, vor der Schranke seiner eigenen Brust [italics mine] noch nicht gewiss, ob eine Schuld seinen Gegner drücke. . ." (II, 14). As was the case with Penthesilea, here too the validity of a judgment or action is ultimately established by its fidelity to the interior principle, to "seiner eigenen Brust," to the Ich, which speaks through "Gefühl," and not by an appeal to codified law or religious propositions. As Xylander states: "Er bedarf keiner ausserhalb seines Ichs stehenden Normen und Ideen, die ihm einen Massstab, einen Urteilsgrund vermitteln."[72] This emphasis on the interior principle is reinforced in the opening paragraphs of the Novelle by Kleist's repeated use of the term "Gefühl." He makes reference, for example, to Kohlhaas' "Rechtgefühl, das einer Goldwaage glich," (II, 14) and notes in the opening lines of the story that "das Rechtgefühl aber machte ihn zum Räuber und Mörder" (II, 9). It is "ein richtiges, mit der gebrechlichen Einrichtung der Welt schon bekanntes Gefühl" (II, 15) which prompts his initial caution in prosecuting the Junker, and "ein ebenso vortreffliches Gefühl" (II, 16) which tells him that

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[72] Oskar Ritter von Xylander, Heinrich von Kleist und J. J. Rousseau ("Germanische Studien," Heft 93; Berlin: Verlag Emil Ebering, 1939), 342.

it is his duty to procure satisfaction for himself and to insure the future security of his fellows.

But the "Schranke seiner eigenen Brust" is far more than a tribunal of the emotions, and Kohlhaas' "Rechtgefühl" is rooted in strata far deeper than those of superficial sentiment. To willfully deprive him of elementary justice, an undeniable and indispensable prerequisite for the meaningful existence of the Ich, is to intrude upon the sacredness of his person, is to negate the core of his humanity. "Lieber ein Hund sein, wenn ich von Füssen getreten werden soll, als ein Mensch!" (II, 27). Seen from this perspective, his initial attempt to procure justice is, as Lisbeth terms it, "ein Werk Gottes" (II, 20). And the weight Kohlhaas himself attaches to his mission is reflected in his reaction when it runs afoul of petty bureaucratic intrigue. He first weeps "eine Träne auf den Brief," (II, 22) and later, after a second unsuccessful prosecution of his case, we are told that he "schäumte vor Wut" (II, 24). Then follow his ominous preparations to pursue the case further; he is willing to sell his business and disrupt his home itself, for it is his conviction that "es könne Zwecke geben, in Vergleich mit welchen, seinem Hauswesen, als ein ordentlicher Vater, vorzustehen, untergeordnet und nichtswürdig sei. . ." (II, 25). Obviously Kohlhaas is not concerned about "hurt feelings" or even primarily about a violated sense of justice. It is the elemental reality of his unique person about which he is concerned. His Ich has been trodden upon, the center of his existence; the very basis of meaningful life has been challenged. Kohlhaas is literally fighting for his life, for the right to be, for the preservation of that integrity without which

he cannot be truly human.

Lisbeth, his wife, makes one final attempt to procure justice in a peaceable way, but she fails and is mortally wounded in the process. Just before her death she pages through the Bible until she finds the text: "Vergib deinen Feinden; tue wohl auch denen, die dich hassen" (II, 30). With her finger pointing to this text she looks at her husband, then dies. Kohlhaas' response to this mute plea that he forgive is a bit ambiguous. "Kohlhaas dachte: 'so möge mir Gott nie vergeben, wie ich dem Junker vergebe'" (II, 30). But however one may wish to interpret the "wie" of this statement,[73] the thrust of his response is clearly negative. He is not willing to forgive the Junker, despite the biblical injunction. The Junker is, in a real way, responsible for the death of Lisbeth also, and thus has touched the person of Kohlhaas a second time. And instead of forgiving, immediately after the funeral he takes up "das Geschäft der Rache."

Just what is this "Rache?" It is the primitive response to an attack upon the Ich, the elemental, last-ditch effort of the

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[73]Benno von Wiese, for example, lays great stress on Kleist's use of the word "wie," and maintains that it softens Kohlhaas' statement so that it does not constitute a categorical refusal to forgive. "Richtiger ist es wohl," he writes, "wenn wir mit Gerhard Fricke annehmen, dass Kohlhaas seiner Frau klarmachen will, einem Erbärmlichen könne man nicht vergeben; das wäre nur eine Scheingeste, und diese Art von Vergebung könne er auch sich von Gott nicht wünschen" (Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka [2 vols.; Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1956-1962], I, 50). To Clemens Lugowski, on the other hand, Kohlhaas' statement simply means "dass er vielmehr ganz schlicht und einfach durchaus nicht gewillt ist, dem Junker zu vergeben" (Lugowski, 194). It is my opinion that Lugowski is nearer the truth at this point, particularly when one considers the firmness of his later refusal to forgive in the course of his conversation with Luther, and the spirit he reveals in swallowing the capsule immediately prior to his execution.

person to assert his right to be, his desperate unwillingness to be cancelled out as a legitimate entity in human society and the life of the world. And just as it is the concrete person of Kohlhaas which has been violated, so it is the person of the Junker which is to be touched in revenge. This is why Kohlhaas is not satisfied with the destruction of Tronka's castle, for this struggle is in essence person against person. Had justice been meted out by the courts of law, such action would not have been necessary, for the administration of legal justice would have constituted an affirmation of the right of the person Kohlhaas to be. But such justice apparently is not forthcoming, and Kohlhaas has no choice but to take matters into his own hands, to destroy the agent who has negated his person, in order once more to stand up and be himself.

As long as there apparently is no legal recourse for him, Kohlhaas proceeds with devastating resoluteness. The sanctions for his actions clearly are religious and once again <u>internally</u> grounded. He challenges Tronka "kraft der ihm angeborenen Macht," (II, 31) and later terms himself "einen Reichs- und Weltfreien, Gott allein unterworfenen Herrn" (II, 36). His war against the Junker is, on the one hand, intensely personal, but it is at the same time fought on behalf of <u>all</u> persons, for what has happened to him could, if unchecked, happen to others. If his <u>Ich</u> is not inviolable,neither is that of anyone else. Thus Tronka becomes "der allgemeine Feind aller Christen," (II, 36) and nothing short of the establishment of "eine bessere Ordnung der Dinge" (II, 41) will suffice. He is <u>not</u> fighting for an idea, but for justice as an existential

prerequisite for the life of persons, and more immediately, for the right of his own person to be.

Then Luther stops him short, accusing him of injustice and branding both his behavior and his frame of mind as unchristian. He refuses to serve Holy Communion to Kohlhaas if he in turn will not forgive the Junker. Despite his earnest desire to receive the Abendmahl, despite his personal respect and reverence for Luther, "der teuerste und verehrungswürdigste Name, den er kannte," (II, 44) he will not and cannot forgive the Junker. Although Christ's injunction to forgive "seventy times seven" is totally unconditional, Kohlhaas, "errötend," insists that "der Herr auch vergab allen seinen Feinden nicht," (II, 48) and pleads that he be allowed the same privilege. To forgive would be to deny himself, to affirm his essential non-entity. He forgoes the sacrament rather than forgive, and leaves Luther's presence "mit dem Ausdruck schmerzlicher Empfindung" (II, 49).

It does not seem to occur to Kohlhaas that his attitudes and actions are contradictory to the spirit and teachings of Christianity. He unabashedly requests that he be given the sacrament, while showing little remorse about the fact that his murderous actions have cost great loss of life and property on the part of innocent people. He even attempts to defend his unwillingness to forgive by somehow appealing to the example of Christ Himself. At the end of the Novelle he receives Holy Communion and then, as a final gesture, swallows the capsule with the conscious and calculated intention of hurting his adversary, of procuring satisfaction ("Genugtuung") for the wrong he has suffered. "Du kannst mich auf

das Schafott bringen, ich aber kann dir weh tun, und ich wills!" (II, 86). But despite Kohlhaas' blind spots in this regard, Günter Blöcker's terse verdict cannot be questioned: "Kohlhaas ist kein christlicher Held. Er will nicht verzeihen."[74]

Luther, in the course of his conversation with Kohlhaas, terms him "unbegreiflich," (II, 46) and with good reason, for he and Kohlhaas live in different worlds. Luther does not appreciate the Ich-Gefühl which stands central in Kohlhaas' life, which dictates his actions from beginning to end. Luther's Christianity, his very life, has its focus in the concepts of guilt and grace, sin and salvation, as defined in the Bible. When Kohlhaas is confronted with a choice between taking the sacrament, at the cost of forgiving his enemy, or asserting the rights of his Ich, he can only choose the latter, for the ultimate court of appeal is not the inscripturated word as understood by orthodox Christianity. It is instead "die Schranke seiner eigenen Brust," the religious imperative issuing from the depths of his existence as a unique person, the "I am." Kohlhaas does partake of the sacrament before he dies, and is accompanied to the scaffold by a Lutheran pastor. But the pastor is soon lost in the crowd. It is not his message which causes Kohlhaas' eyes to shine in the face of the scaffold. It is instead the presence of the sleek, stamping team of horses, the sweet taste of the Zettel, and the sight of the collapsing Kurfürst.

Thus Kohlhaas' ultimate orientation is not essentially different from that of Penthesilea or any other Kleistian hero. He

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[74]Blöcker, 222.

too takes orders "vom Herzen." The term "Gefühl" admittedly is not used with any frequency after the initial pages of the Novelle. But if any Kleistian figure is true to his person, to the inner voice of "Gefühl," it is Kohlhaas. Although heaven and earth, the forces of the church and state, oppose him, he remains faithful to his Ich, the ultimate, religious wellspring of his being.

One cannot, of course, automatically assume that all of Kohlhaas' actions meet with Kleist's approbation, or that the sentiments he voices are necessarily those of Kleist. Nevertheless it is my conviction that the values for which Kohlhaas stands are in essence those of Kleist himself.

In the first place, Kleist's depiction of Kohlhaas is basically positive in tone, although there is a kind of dual judgment rendered in this Novelle, as Günter Blöcker so clearly demonstrates. There is on the one hand the judgment of the chronicler, who occasionally delivers negative verdicts on specific attitudes or actions of Kohlhaas. But more importantly:

> Unabhängig . . . von solchen moralischen Notierungen, die wirken, als seien sie dem Leib der Dichtung aufgeklebt, läuft ein Goldfaden der Verklärung. Immer breiter, immer leuchtkräftiger werdend, führt er hin zu dem gleichermassen von weltlichem Glanz und himmlischer Erwartung durchfluteten Finale auf dem Richtplatz zu Berlin. Kohlhaas' Sterben gleicht einer Himmelfahrt, die Szene auf der Richtstätte einem Auferstehungszeremoniell; und wie von einer Himmelfahrt bleibt ein Lichtschein zurück. . . .[75]

Kohlhaas clearly has Kleist's sympathy.

And even more significantly, Kohlhaas does not stand alone. The message of this Novelle, if one may speak in such terms, is at heart the same message or theme we have noted in the other works

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[75]Blöcker, 213.

of Kleist. The frequency with which Kleist emphasizes this theme points, it seems to me, to the firm hold it has upon his own spirit. But more of this later.

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In the works discussed there has been a relatively clear emphasis on the Ich as the ultimate, religiously grounded center of human existence. Because "Gefühl" is the voice of this internal center, and thus is "eine bebende Stimme der Wahrheit," adherence to its dicta is an absolute prerequisite for meaningful existence. In the face of threatening and baffling reality, "Gefühl" stands as an immovable rock--the criterion for valid judgments and the guide to right action.

In such works as Die Marquise von O . . . and Michael Kohlhaas the integrity of the person is assaulted by forces which threaten to overwhelm it. The strength to overcome can only be derived from deep within. It is only from this non-rational, interior perspective that meaning can be perceived and the power to prevail can be derived.

It is this same menacing reality which constitutes a potent threat to the establishment and maintenance of meaningful interpersonal relationships. Life's confusing maze seems to militate against communion, against a positive meeting of the Ich and the Du. There is so much that seems to get in the way, to thwart efforts at communication, to reinforce the essential isolation of the person.

For the Kleistian person there is a way out of this predicament; the threat to the establishment of a bond between persons can be overcome if each person lives out of the religious center of his existence, taking his cues solely from "Gefühl." The name Kleist

gives to this stance, to this adherence to the interior principle in dealing with others, is Vertrauen. Thus Blöcker terms "Vertrauen" "die praktische Konsequenz dieses Gefühls."[76] If one allows himself to be misled by appearances, by the deceptions of everyday existence, communion becomes an impossibility. Only if one lives in Vertrauen, and views the Du and all of its actions and intentions from this perspective, can meaningful interpersonal relationships prevail. Certainty as to the other person must be rooted within, and thus be capable of withstanding all of the onslaughts of life. Vertrauen means to have faith, in the deeper sense of the term, in the Du--the faith "which overcomes the world."

This organic relationship between "Gefühl" and Vertrauen points to the bond existing between the works already discussed and those which are to be treated next. They clearly are cut from the same cloth. Vertrauen is little more than the application of the Kleistian Gefühlstheologie to relations between persons. It should be immediately pointed out, however, that the fact that three of Kleist's works are singled out as exhibiting with particular clarity the workings of Vertrauen does not mean that the depiction of this phenomenon is restricted to these three works. One need only think of Der Zweikampf and Die Marquise von O . . ., two of the works in which Vertrauen and Misstrauen obviously play prominent roles. It is only because the primary focus of the three works to be treated next is upon the possibility and prerequisites of meaningful I-thou relationships that they are temporarily set apart from Kleist's other dramas and Novellen.

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[76]Blöcker, 51.

Die Familie Schroffenstein

Willst dus?
. . . . . .
Mit mir leben?
Fest an mir halten? Dem Gespenst
des Misstrauens,
Das wieder vor mir treten könnte,
kühn
Entgegenschreiten? Unabänderlich,
Und wäre der Verdacht auch noch so
gross,
Dem Vater nicht, der Mutter nicht
so traun,
Als mir? (ll. 1339-46)

The tone of Die Familie Schroffenstein, Kleist's earliest published work, is markedly bleak; a "Verzweiflungsdrama" it is termed by Günter Blöcker.[77] This tragedy is filled with distrust, despair, murder, and madness, and clearly reflects the mood of a Kleist still reeling from the effects of his Kantkrise. But despite the pervasive pessimism informing the drama, it also contains suggestions that there is a way out of hatred and distrust, that there is a way of overcoming.

Schroffenstein depicts two modes of meeting and interpreting reality, particularly as it has to do with the Du, with other persons. Simply stated, they are the ways of "Vertrauen" and "Misstrauen." It is about these two central concepts, these two "faiths," that the entire play revolves.

Sylvester Schroffenstein obviously has his finger on the key problem in the unhappy relationship between the houses of Warwand and Rossitz when he states: "Das Misstraun ist die schwarze Sucht der Seele" (l. 515). Because she is beset with this basic lack of trust, it is as plain as day to Gertrude that the house of Rossitz

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[77]Blöcker, 22.

is responsible for the death of her son, (see ll. 534ff.) and because Rupert's vision is colored by this same distrust, he is equally certain that his young son Peter has been murdered by agents of the house of Warwand. It is this certainty which ultimately leads Rupert to kill Jeronimus, a messenger of peace, and to distort Sylvester's noblest gestures into presumed stratagems of cunning deceit.

But before one becomes too harsh with the Gertrudes and Ruperts, it should be recognized that, due to the "gebrechliche Einrichtung der Welt," the evidence often appears to a greater or lesser extent to support their mistaken convictions. Rupert did find two men of the house of Warwand "mit blutgen Messern" (l. 215) standing next to the body of his dead son, and Johann did frenziedly press himself upon Agnes, dagger in hand. Given a basic attitude of "Misstrauen," the evidence does indeed suggest foul play, it does in fact, in the dark world of Schroffenstein, contribute to the confusion and final catastrophe.

If some semblance of meaning is to be gained from such a world, if meaningful bonds between persons are to be established and maintained, a radical re-orientation must take place. "Misstrauen" and "Sinnenglaubigkeit," to use Müller-Seidel's terms,[78] must be countered with and replaced by "Vertrauen" and "Gefühlsglaubigkeit." Ignoring, when necessary, the evidence of the senses and the testimony of a confusing world, and relying upon immediate, internally grounded certainty, "das Gefühl . . . der Seelengüte andrer," (l. 1357) the Ich can encounter the Du, and communication can take place.

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[78]See Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen, 53ff.

This is the experience of Agnes and Ottokar. As long as their relationship is not based solely on absolute trust, come what may, it cannot stand. Ottokar realizes this full well, particularly after Agnes suspects him of attempting to poison her. He clearly has come to know the prerequisite for true communion. Thus he questions her:

> Willst dus? . . . Mit mir leben?
> Fest an mir halten? Dem Gespenst des Misstrauens,
> Das wieder vor mir treten könnte, kühn
> Entgegenschreiten? Unabänderlich,
> Und wäre der Verdacht auch noch so gross,
> Dem Vater nicht, der Mutter nicht so traun,
> Als mir? (ll. 1339-1346)

Agnes assents, and in so doing becomes "ganz deine, in der grenzenlosesten Bedeutung" (l. 1347).

Once they have taken this initial step, once they have established "Vertrauen" in their relationship to one another, they are eventually enabled to pierce through the haze to a realization that their initial evaluations in regard to the guilt and innocence of their warring fathers also was wrong. The evidence itself has not changed materially, but especially Ottokar is now led to see that he has misinterpreted it. The evidence which previously had so conclusively proved the guilt of Agnes' father is now seen from a different perspective, is transfigured by his newly won point of departure--"Vertrauen." And Agnes too, once she assents to seeing Ottokar's father, Rupert, "mit deinen Augen," (l. 1391) comes to perceive the error in her initial judgment.

Agnes and Ottokar are not totally alone in affirming the validity of the interior perspective, intuitive certainty, in respect to interpersonal relationships. Take, for example, the case of

Sylvester, Agnes' father. He well knows the deceptive nature of empirical evidence and the ease with which it can be distorted, provided "Misstrauen" and the will to distort are present.

> Das Misstraun ist die schwarze Sucht der Seele,
> Und alles, auch das Schuldlos-Reine, zieht
> Fürs kranke Aug die Tracht der Hölle an.
> Das Nichtsbedeutende, Gemeine, ganz
> Alltägliche, spitzfündig, wie zerstreute
> Zwirnfäden, wirds zu einem Bild geknüpft,
> Das uns mit grässlichen Gestalten schreckt. (ll. 515-521)

Eustache, Ottokar's mother, also shows some of Sylvester's spirit, although she does not exhibit his resolute strength.

> Ja, dieser Hass, der die zwei Stämme trennt,
> Stets grundlos schien er mir, und stets bemüht
> War ich, die Männer auszusöhnen--doch
> Ein neues Misstraun trennte stets sie wieder
> Auf Jahre, wenn so kaum ich sie vereinigt. (ll. 1647-51)

But in the end Eustache's counsel is engulfed by the wild rage of her husband, and Sylvester himself is overwhelmed by a tide of events which breaks even his faith.

One final word on "Misstrauen" and the world of Schroffenstein. The conflict in this drama is only to a limited extent between "Gefühl," or intuitive certainty, and Sinnengläubigkeit, an overly-eager readiness to rely upon empirical evidence. More accurately stated, the fundamental antagonism has to do with "Vertrauen" and "Misstrauen," both of which are basically irrational and internally grounded. The difference between them is that "Vertrauen" involves the continued affirmation of "das Seelengüte andrer," to use Agnes' term. But this is a rather large order, for it is obvious that in the world which Kleist has constructed, "reality" appears to militate against this confidence and to reinforce distrust. In other words, both "Misstrauen" and "Vertrauen" reflect

a kind of faith, but the latter is considerably more difficult to hold than the former. To use current idiom, the cards seem almost hopelessly stacked against it.

But it is possible to establish communion, as the example of Agnes and Ottokar illustrates. In the dark and tangled world of Schroffenstein both of them must die, but their death negates neither the necessity nor the possibility of such relationships, if life is to have meaning and richness. And this is the insight to which their parents also come--though belatedly, as they finally are reconciled over the bodies of their children.

Die Verlobung in St. Domingo and Der zerbrochene Krug

> Du hättest mir nicht misstrauen sollen. . . . (II, 193)
> Pfui, Ruprecht, pfui, o schäme dich, dass du
> Mir nicht in meiner Tat vertrauen kannst.
> (Vol. I, p. 216, ll. 1164-66)

Although Die Verlobung in St. Domingo ends with a murder and suicide, and Der zerbrochene Krug closes with a reconciliation, these works clearly do share the same basic theme. Both of them have to do with "Vertrauen" and its breakdown in a moment of supreme trial, and thus also reveal close kinship to Die Familie Schroffenstein.

Empirical evidence, as depicted in the Krug and the Verlobung, seems to speak even more clearly than it did in Schroffenstein. The facts of the case in these two works are not nearly as fragmentary and ambiguous as they were in Kleist's earliest drama. Ruprecht in Der zerbrochene Krug did find his Eve late at night in the company of another man; he did hear them whispering together in the intimate

privacy of her own room; and he did physically lay hands on Eve's nocturnal visitor. Furthermore, even though her honor is at stake, Eve remains tight-lipped, refusing to divulge the identity of the person Ruprecht drove out of her room. Little wonder that Ruprecht comes to the conclusion that she is guilty of gross infidelity.

Similarly, Gustav von der Ried awakens to find himself tied, rendered defenseless at the very moment that Congo Hoango, who surely intends to kill him, arrives home. And who has tied him but Toni herself, who clearly states in his presence that her intent in binding him was to prevent his escape. Furthermore, Gustav knows only too well that Toni's own mother, Babekan, suffered cruelly at the hands of her white master, and apparently has good reason to share Congo Hoango's hatred of the white man. It seems not at all surprising that Gustav loses all confidence in Toni.

But not only does the evidence seem to speak more clearly than it did in Schroffenstein; grounds for disregarding this same evidence are also more plainly depicted in the Krug and the Verlobung. Eve's conduct since her solemn promise to marry Ruprecht has been beyond reproach; she has given him her word, and nothing in her past behavior gives any grounds for suspicion of infidelity on her part. And Toni has gone so far as to give herself to Gustav--totally, unconditionally, body and soul. Their relationship has been marked by the establishment of the most intimate bond possible between a man and a woman. She has given every indication of absolute sincerity, and Gustav himself has come to regard her as "seine liebe Braut" (II, 176).

But both Ruprecht and Gustav fail to pass the test. When

confronted with sense evidence which seems contradictory to what should have been the testimony of the soul, both choose to believe the former. Ruprecht cruelly and publicly rejects Eve, terming her a "Metze" (II, 467). And Gustav shoots Toni "mitten durch die Brust," (II, 192) without allowing her a single word in her own defense.

Each of these men fails the woman who loves him; neither of them can muster the faith necessary for the preservation of a genuine I-thou relationship. Thus Eve's reproachful

> Pfui, Ruprecht, pfui, o schäme dich, dass du
> Mir nicht in meiner Tat vertrauen kannst.
> Gab ich die Hand dir nicht und sagte: ja,
> Als du mich fragtest, Eve, willst du mich? (ll. 1164-67)

and Toni's dying "Ach . . . du hättest mir nicht misstrauen sollen" (II, 193).

As was noted above, the lines are more clearly drawn in these two works than in Die Familie Schroffenstein. There has been, on the one hand, real proof of inner fidelity on the part of both Eve and Toni. But there is at the same time less ambiguity in the sense evidence apparently contradicting this fidelity.

Just how can one approach this situation. The Krug gives a rather clear statement of how Eve and Ruprecht view the matter. Eve insists that all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, Ruprecht should have trusted her--absolutely. The voice of the heart, the interior principle, "Gefühl," the ultimate, religiously grounded source of certainty, should have told him that all was well.

> Und hättest du durchs Schlüsselloch mich mit
> Dem Lebrecht aus dem Kruge trinken sehen,
> Du hättest denken sollen: Ev ist brav,

> Es wird sich alles ihr zum Ruhme lösen,
> Und ists im Leben nicht, so ist es jenseits,
> Und wenn wir auferstehn, ist auch ein Tag. (ll. 1169-74)

Ruprecht's candid response to this demand is negative.

> Mein Seel, das dauert mir zu lange, Evchen.
> Was ich mit Händen greife, glaub ich gern. (ll. 1175-76)

In other words, the testimony of the eyes and ears, of common sense, takes precedence for him over the less tangible testimony of the soul.

The test failed by Ruprecht and Gustav is a severe test, and Kleist knew it full well, for "reality" seems to be partisan--and on the side of "Misstrauen." But there is no other way from the Ich to the Du but the direct way, the immediate way. If one bypasses this way, if one looks to the right or the left, or takes a detour, one will not arrive. Certainty as to the Du must be rooted firmly and exclusively in the Ich; the only way from person to person is absolute "Vertrauen." And if this way fails, there can be no real communion, for life will seal the person off from his fellows, and his lot will be one of utter, unbreakable loneliness.

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There remain five additional works of Kleist, all of which apparently post-date Amphitryon. Fricke comprehensively asserts that "der Begriff des Gefühls ist vom Amphitryon an der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Problematik Kleists und seiner Dichtung,"[79] thus including these five works. He himself discusses only nine of Kleist's dramas and Novellen, for his book on Kleist, he informs us, is meant only as a preliminary study.[80] A more inclusive work

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[79]Fricke, 71.

[80]Fricke, 6.

would presumably include the discussion of "Gefühl" as the key concept also in Kleist's remaining later works.

I seriously doubt, however, that the concept of "Gefühl" is central in Das Erdbeben in Chili (1806?), Das Bettelweib von Locarno (1810), Die heilige Cäcilie (1810), or Der Findling (1811?). One can no doubt force them into a pre-established framework, but to do so would involve, I am convinced, a good deal of distortion. The fact that the concept of "Gefühl" does not dominate these Novellen in no way disproves the basic validity of Fricke's insight, for "Gefühl" is doubtlessly of central importance in Kleist's most significant works. It only suggests that the statement of Fricke quoted above is a bit too sweeping in scope.

This leaves us with Die Hermannsschlacht, dating back to 1808, which Fricke does briefly treat in his Gefühl und Schicksal. But it seems to me to be significant that his discussion of this drama itself is extremely short, and not particularly illuminating. This play obviously was written with one purpose in mind: namely, to stimulate the Germans to revolt against French military and political domination. As a piece of political propoganda it stands quite by itself, and its basic intent can be quite clearly grasped without recourse to concepts such as "die Religion des Gefühls" and the "irdische Bestimmung" of the German nation. And even if Die Hermannsschlacht does show some points of contact with Kleist's Gefühlstheologie as developed in other works, it surely adds nothing of significance to an understanding of Kleist's basic religious orientation.

Summary

The central concern of this chapter has been an examination of Kleist's depiction of "Gefühl" as an avenue of religious truth. In an effort to summarize and give focus to the foregoing discussion, I should like at this juncture to briefly review some of the salient points which have emerged in the course of this study.

In the first place, "Gefühl" as depicted by Kleist is, in my opinion, clearly a religious phenomenon. This is not to say, of course, that "Gefühl" is simply another avenue to the God of traditional Christianity. Kleist is not merely discarding the formal elements of the orthodox faith, and substituting for them his own approach to the God of whom the Christian Scriptures speak. "Gefühl" is not just another name for prayer, as traditionally understood. And above all, nowhere in his works is it a means to mystical union with God, in the tradition of medieval Christianity.

But this does not mean that "Gefühl" is not essentially a a religious phenomenon, or that Kleist's basic concern is not a religious concern. His works reveal a profound, even desperate concern with the question of meaning, with ultimate truth, with ultimate sanctions, and such a concern, I am convinced, can legitimately be termed religious. He seeks to penetrate to the source of that truth, to the final root of human existence and his own unique being, and feels that he has discovered it--not in the revealed truth of formal religion, but deep within. Fricke terms this "Ground of Being" with which Kleist seeks to make contact "God," with "Gefühl" then serving as a kind of divine voice. Although the use of such terminology can be misleading because of its association with

traditional Christianity, it is helpful insofar as it serves to underscore the religious nature of Kleist's quest.

In the second place, it is immediately obvious that neither Kleist nor the figures created by him are interested in theological speculation or the establishment of propositional religious truth. Their concern is not with the development of a body of doctrine or the construction of a well-defined, universally valid ethical system. There is for them no such thing as meaning in the abstract. Faced with a baffling world, they seek to know the way in the immediate, totally unique, concrete situation in which they find themselves. Sylvester Schroffenstein's agonized appeal:

> Gott der Gerechtigkeit!
> Sprich deutlich mit dem Menschen, dass ers weiss
> Auch, was er soll! (ll. 2609-11)

is for light in the darkness of his own concrete, desperate situation. Alkmene, threatened in the inner sanctity of her person, seeks certainty in the vividly real situation in which she alone finds herself. The Marquise von O . . . , torn in her utter loneliness between the firm knowledge of her own innocence and the indisputable fact of pregnancy, seeks and finds the spiritual resources to meet her specific need. Penthesilea, Amazon queen and lover of Achilles, strives for the way out of the unbearable tension she alone is experiencing. But the lonely struggle experienced by each of these figures is in essence a religious struggle, a struggle for the final, ultimate answer.

Finally, it seems to me to be of great significance that although most of these figures presumably are adherents of some revealed religion, none of them places ultimate trust in, or gives ultimate allegiance to his formal religion. Several examples from

Kleist's works come readily to mind. Sylvester Schroffenstein, caught up in his desperate plight, appears to regard the pronouncements of his religion as inadequate, for they do not afford the clarity he so desperately seeks. The Marquise von O . . . is indeed married in the church, but in the hour of her dire need she does not appeal for reassurance or strength to the ministrations of the church or the comforts of the Christian faith. She delves instead deep within, becoming "mit sich selbst bekannt," and thus is enabled to stand. Penthesilea ultimately rejects the religion to which she has previously been subject, feeling that it is destructive of her innermost needs and rights. Michael Kohlhaas apparently desires the comforts of his religion, but when it is a matter of adherence to one of its basic demands or the affirmation of his own person, he chooses the latter. The Prince of Homburg, who so piously prays prior to the battle of Fehrbellin, derives absolutely no strength or comfort from the Christian faith when confronted with the horrible reality of death. Nor is his moral regeneration a result of strengthened Christian faith. And finally there is Der Zweikampf, in which Littegarde, well nigh overwhelmed by her experiences, is not first of all counselled by Friedrich von Trota to faith in God, but is instead admonished to hold fast to her "Gefühl."

The above examples, it seems to me, do not necessarily indicate that Kleist felt particularly antagonistic toward Chrisianity--or any other religion. But his works do suggest that he regarded all of the so-called revealed religions to be basically inadequate in meeting his existential situation. For the testimony of Kleist's works indicates that he could not accept any objective religious authority,

that he could not accept as normative or relevant religious propositions or tenets whose validity is based upon an exterior witness. Kleist does not seek the way, for everyone, but rather his way, for him. And his way will never be found through an appeal to objective religious precepts. It will only be found if he goes to the interior source of his unique person, if he listens to his "Gefühl" as it issues from the Ground of his being. Ultimate religious sanctions for him can only be derived from deep within. And the answer to the question of existential meaning too is ultimately intensely personal, and cannot be gained from an appeal to religious or theological formulations "out there."

With specific reference to Christianity, it is obvious that the adoption of the above perspective results in an emphasis quite foreign to that of traditional Christianity. Opposed to this stress on the absolute uniqueness of the person is the familiar Christian insistence that all individuals are at heart alike, since they all are created in the Divine image. Obviously there are prominent differences among them, differences which must be respected, but nevertheless all of them are children of the same Father. And because of this common origin and resultant basic similarity, there can be a single Way, according to traditional Christianity--one which meets the needs of all persons.

A further basic difference suggests itself, particularly in the light of the emphasis seen in Michael Kohlhaas. The Christian Way in a world which defies total comprehension involves a posture of surrender, of finding the self in Christ by losing the self in Him, whereas for a figure like Kohlhaas, at least, one finds

the self by preserving it--despite the coercion exercised by family, church, and state. Stated succinctly, it is in essence a matter of self-surrender versus self-preservation.

This does not imply, among other things, the categorical denial of a social dimension in Kleist's works and thought. He himself desperately feels the need for communion and communication with others, and in such works as Die Verlobung in St. Domingo and Der zerbrochene Krug he focuses specifically upon the problems involved in the meeting of Ich and Du. But perhaps the basic loneliness which marks Kleist himself throughout so much of his life results at least in part from the tension inherent in this dual emphasis: the consciousness, on the one hand, of the absolutely inviolable sanctity of the unique Ich, and at the same time, a keen realization of the need for communion.

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As was noted in the opening chapter of this dissertation, the contours of Kleist's religion are not accurately defined in most critical studies. Some scholars, particularly Friedrich Braig and August Sauer, approach their task with an obvious confessional bias which results in a basically distorted picture of Kleist's religious views. Other critics, such as Maass and Hohoff, while issuing curt pronouncements on this subject, make no effort to give it thorough and systematic consideration. The results of either procedure obviously are grossly unsatisfactory.

This dissertation is intended as an objective study of the various aspects of Kleist's religion. One objective of this study, as previously stated, involves an examination of the relationship between Kleist's religious thought and that of traditional Christianity, a relationship badly needing clear definition.

In an attempt to meet this objective without falling prey to the unwarranted subjectivity which marks Braig's study, or to the undocumented generalizations of a Maass or Hohoff, the following methodology is employed in the remaining pages of this study. In each case the examination of a specific element of Kleist's religious belief is preceded by a very brief discussion of orthodox Christian thought as it pertains to the subject at hand. The utilization of such a procedure is not, of course, motivated by a polemical concern. It is instead hoped that a statement of traditional Christian thought, as summarized in the Apostles' Creed, the most widely accepted Christian creed, will provide a concrete frame of reference within which a meaningful study may be accomplished.

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CHAPTER V

GOD AND SALVATION

The Nature of God and His Activity

The Traditional Christian View

> I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. . . .

Prominent in the first article of the Creed is an affirmation of belief in God as Father; Father, according to traditional Christian thought, not only of Christ, but also of the Christian, His creature. It is important to note that God is not seen here as an impersonal Force, as the First Cause, but as Father. And as Father of Christ He exercises not only judgment, but above all His love for His children.

Furthermore, He is, in orthodox Christian thought, "the Father Almighty," which means, in the words of Calvin, "that he has all things under his power and hand."[1] He, as Father, "upholds and governs"[2] heaven and earth, so that "nothing in the world is independent of God. . . ."[3] God is not viewed in the creed as the

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[1]Quoted in Karl Barth, The Faith of the Church, trans. from the French by Gabriel Vahanian (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963), 45.

[2]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism" as found in Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (3 vols., 4th edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), III, 315.

[3]Barth, Faith of the Church, 51.

Eternal Watchmaker of Deism, One who winds the mechanism He has constructed and then steps back to observe as it runs out its course. He is instead seen as a provident God who in His almighty goodness directs the course of events, so that "all things come not by chance but by his fatherly hand."[4]

And finally, the world is, according to traditional Christian formulations, a creation of God, and thus contingent, derived--not absolute. "It does not exist aside from him who ordains."[5] But at the same time "the world is not an emanation from God, but the putting into being of something different from God, which is over against God."[6] God and His world, in the light of orthodox belief, are not to be identified; Creator and Creature are not to be confused. Yet His power is "almighty and everywhere present"[7] in the creation of His hand.

Kleist's View of God and His Activity

As was noted earlier in this dissertation,[8] Kleist's letters and other early writings make relatively frequent reference to the Deity. But it soon becomes evident that the terminology he employs in commenting about God is markedly different from the language of the Creed. Whereas the Creed refers to God in more personal terms, as "Father," Kleist's terminology tends to be rather impersonal and

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[4]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism," Schaff, III, 316.

[5]Barth, Faith of the Church, 51.

[6]Barth, Faith of the Church, 48.

[7]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism," Schaff, III, 316.

[8]See Chapter III, p. 111.

abstract. Time and again he refers to the Deity as "der Himmel"[9] and "die Gottheit."[10] Less frequently used, but equally impersonal in tone are such designations of God as "der Wille, der über uns waltet," (II, 670) and "der Geist, der an der Spitze der Welt steht" (II, 768).

And one would scarcely expect that it be otherwise, for the intellectual milieu and early training of young Kleist stood clearly under the sign of the Aufklärung.[11] The Enlightenment tended in its discussion of religious issues to reject traditional Christian anthropomorphism in favor of intellectual abstraction, and Kleist's terminology simply reflects that emphasis. As Prigge-Kruhoeffer states, for the youthful Kleist "Gott ist unpersönlich, eine Summe von Begriffen: Vollkommenheit, Vernunft, Gerechtigkeit."[12] In referring to God in abstract terms he is simply using the idiom of his day.

This same rather impersonal God seems at rare and isolated times to be benevolent, to be well-disposed toward men. "Was mit der Güte und Weisheit Gottes streitet," he writes in his "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden," "kann nicht wahr sein. Der Gottheit liegen die Menschen alle gleich nahe am Herzen. . ."(II, 302). But

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[9]See, for example, Werke, II, pp. 509, 511, 574, 617, 646, 683, 684.

[10]See Werke, II, pp. 477, 586, 301, 302. Future volume, page, and line references to Kleist's works in this chapter will be made in parentheses.

[11]See Chapter II, pp. 46ff. of this dissertation.

[12]Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, "Heinrich von Kleist, Religiosität und Charakter," Jahrbuch der Kleist-Gesellschaft, III and IV, 1923-24 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1925), 1.

even before the Kantkrise and the destruction of his early religion, he seems to entertain strong doubts as to the benevolence of "der Himmel, . . . der, wie bekannt, die Wünsche der armen Menschen so oft unerfüllt lässt. . ." (II, 574). And his later statement that Heaven is obligated to give its creatures "Lebensgenuss" (II, 684) rings more like evidence of wishful thinking than experiential religious certainty. Only at his death does he seem to communicate more personally and positively with God, and then only in gratitude for "den herrlichsten und wollüstigsten aller Tode (II, 887).

Whatever early uncertainty Kleist may have entertained as to the nature and intentions of "der Himmel" could only be reinforced by his Kantkrise. The teleological Weltbild central to his early religion disintegrates finally and totally as a result of this crisis. Truth, he discovers, is unattainable here below, and thus the path to perfection is hopelessly destroyed. The God of "Güte und Weisheit" becomes an enigma, inscrutable. He is there, somewhere, but his ways with men cannot be known. Thus Otto Ludwig writes: "Der Gott bleibt bei ihm in den Wolken, und dadurch entsteht sein Tragisches. . . ."[13] And Günter Blöcker: "Kleists Menschen leben im Rätsel. Das ist der Daseinsraum, den ihnen der Dichter nach der Kant-Krise zuweist--ihnen wie sich selbst."[14]

Kleist's letters contain ample evidence of his despairing conviction that God and His purposes defy human comprehension.

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[13]Quoted by Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist's Conception of the Tragic (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 21.

[14]Günter Blöcker, Heinrich von Kleist oder das absolute Ich (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1960), 124.

"Wer kann die Wendungen des Schicksals erraten?" (II, 668) he asks Wilhelmine in July of 1801. And after he survives a potentially serious accident he comments: "Wozu der Himmel es [das Leben] mir gefristet hat, wer kann es wissen?" (II, 669). And again, "O wie unbegreiflich ist der Wille, der über uns waltet" (II, 670). And it is undeniable, he laments, "dass wir selbst im Tode noch nicht ahnden, was der Himmel mit uns will. . . (II, 683).

"Es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht; es ist ein bloss unbegriffener," (II, 768) he writes in a letter to Rühle von Lilienstern. But if He is "unbegriffen" and "unbegreiflich," it follows, as Kleist well knew, that one simply cannot know His intentions with men or the bent of His will. One cannot even know whether He is active or inactive, whether He is involved in the course of events or is at best a disinterested spectator. Hence Kleist's statement can be no more positive than "es kann kein böser Geist sein. . ."--more a statement of what cannot be if life is to make any sense at all than a joyful affirmation of what is.

If God cannot be known and the nature of his involvement in the universe cannot be fathomed, there can be no confident belief in Providence. There can be no certainty that there is in the confusing maze of events design created by a "fatherly Hand." The succession of events appears to be mere accident, Zufall, and may be either helpful or harmful. "Wer kann die Wendungen des Schicksals erraten? . . . So wie eine unbegreifliche Fügung mich schnell unglücklich machte, kann nicht eine ebenso unbegreifliche Fügung

mich ebenso schnell glücklich machen?" (II, 669). But one cannot know; there can be only gnawing trepidation in the face of uncertainty.

As was noted in Chapter I of this dissertation, Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer lays heavy stress on Kleist's fear of "Zufall," which she identifies with "Schicksal." "Die Schicksalsangst Kleists ist die Triebkraft seiner Lebensäusserungen, das Fundament, auf dem sich auch seine Religiosität aufbaut,"[15] according to her. And there is doubtlessly a large measure of truth in this insight. Long before his Kantkrise Kleist was painfully aware of the threat posed by "Zufall." His "Lebensplan," which he likens to a "Reiseplan," is consciously intended to enable him to overcome "Zufall." "Ohne Lebensplan leben," he writes in May, 1799, "heisst vom Zufall erwarten, ob er uns so glücklich machen werde, wie wir es selbst nicht begreifen" (II, 490). The construction of a "Lebensplan" is no mere intellectual pastime; it is a matter of great seriousness, of life and death.

> Ja, es ist mir so unbegreiflich, wie ein Mensch ohne Lebensplan leben könne . . . und der Zustand, ohne Lebensplan, ohne feste Bestimmung, immer schwankend zwischen unsichern Wünschen, immer im Widerspruch mit meinen Pflichten, ein Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am Drahte des Schicksals--dieser unwürdige Zustand scheint mir so verächtlich, und würde mich so unglücklich machen, dass mir der Tod bei weitem wünschenswerter wäre. (II, 490)

And in August of 1800, some seven months prior to his Kantkrise, he notes: "Sich dem blinden Zufall überlassen, und warten, ob er uns endlich in den Hafen des Glücks führen wird, das war nichts für mich" (II, 528).

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[15]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 11.

But particularly after his Kantkrise, "Zufall," or "Schicksal" appears to be increasingly menacing. Consider, for example, Die Familie Schroffenstein. It is perhaps unnecessary at this point to enter into the discussion of whether or not this play is a Schicksalstragödie in the classical tradition. One thing is certain: the tone of this drama is bleak and despairing. And "Zufall," as Walter Müller-Seidel reminds us, "[ist] von Anfang bis Ende die alles bewegende 'Wirklichkeit.'"[16] Nor can "Zufall" or "Schicksal," as here depicted, be termed neutral.

> Es zieht ein unsichtbarer Geist, gewaltig,
> Nach einer Richtung alles fort, den Staub,
> Die Wolken, und die Wellen.-- (I, 124, ll. 2021-23)

This "unsichtbarer Geist" is clearly drawing things in the direction of destruction. "Man sieht: hier waltet eine vielfältig verschränkte und dennoch zielstrebige Kausalität, ein wahrhaft schwarzer Mechanismus."[17] God is indeed, in the words of Sylvester, "ein Rätsel," (I, 93, l. 1215) and from the appearance of things, "ohne Güte." The world of Schroffenstein is totally impenetrable and frighteningly destructive. Malice reigns, not Providence. "Der Mensch als Produkt einer undurchschaubaren Schöpfung, die auf sein Fragen mit einer Grimasse antwortet--das ist das Thema der Schroffensteiner."[18]

Because the tone of Kleist's Novelle Der Findling is in many ways similar to that of Schroffenstein, some critics maintain that these two works were written at approximately the same

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[16]Walter Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen: Eine Studie über Heinrich von Kleist (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1961), 79.

[17]Blöcker, 25. [18]Blöcker, 131.

time.[19] Here, as in Schroffenstein, "Zufall" plays a vital role. Nicolo chooses the costume of a "genuesischer Ritter" "zufällig" (II, 204); Piachi notes the presence of Xaviera Tartini's messenger "zufällig" (II, 205); Nicolo discovers that the letters of his name can be made to spell "Colino" "zufällig" (II, 210). And here, even more obviously than in Schroffenstein, these so-called accidents form links in a chain of malicious destruction. It is as though the devil's providence reigns. As Blöcker notes: "Was bloßer Zufall scheint, erweist sich in Wahrheit als zielstrebige Aktion des Bösen."[20] At this moment of dark despair, at least, it seems that Kleist is not at all certain that "es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht. . . ."

But the grim blackness of Schroffenstein and Der Findling by no means characterizes all of Kleist's works. Das Käthchen von Heilbronn in particular seems infused with a brighter outlook; the "most optimistic of Kleist's dramas" it is termed by Blankenagel.[21] In reference to the Kleist who wrote Das Käthchen, Meyer-Benfey states: "Er hat wieder den kindlich-frommen Glauben an eine göttliche Schicksalslenkung. . . ."[22] Friedrich Braig goes so

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[19]Helmut Sembdner dates Der Findling 1811 (see Werke, II, 905), but some critics, among them Blöcker (see p. 133), insist that its bleak tone marks it a product of Kleist's immediately post-Kantian years.

[20]Blöcker, 135.

[21]John Blankenagel, The Dramas of Heinrich von Kleist (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 152.

[22]Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, Kleists Leben und Werke (Göttingen: Otto Hapke Verlag, 1911), 262.

far as to term the play a "christliches Vorsehungsspiel,"[23] and claims to detect on Kleist's part a steady progression from belief in a world of fate, as seen in Schroffenstein, to belief in a world governed by Providence, the world of Käthchen. "Mit grossartiger Konsequenz und Sicherheit," he claims, "ist Kleist den Weg vom Schicksals- zum Vorsehungsdrama gegangen."[24]

Is there in fact such a progression toward a greater degree of optimism in Kleist's works? Does the puzzling God of Schroffenstein step forward in his later plays and reveal Himself to be kindly disposed toward men? This question defies a simple answer, and for a number of reasons. In the first place, there is some doubt as to the chronology of Kleist's works. If, for example, Der Findling was written at the time of Schroffenstein, it may mean that the period of Kleist's darkest pessimism is restricted to his earliest years of creativity, but if it was written in 1811, as Sembdner suggests, it could mean a rather violent relapse into pessimism near the very end of his life. And in the second place, it is extremely difficult to establish a clearly discernible trend in his dramas and Novellen, for each work seems to have a tone almost uniquely and exclusively its own. Thus it is risky procedure to generalize on the basis of one or two works.

Furthermore, the enigmatic quality of many of Kleist's plays and Novellen occasionally makes it difficult even to assess the thrust of an individual work. For example, Friedrich Braig sees

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[23]Friedrich Braig, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925), 316.

[24]Braig, 323.

in Der Zweikampf the rule of Christian Providence;[25] Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer sees in this same Novelle the abstract God of Kleist's rationalistic youth;[26] Clemens Lugowski insists that the God in this Novelle is not Kleist's God at all, but is only a "Hilfskonstruktion," that Kleist actually destroys God in this work;[27] while Friedrich Koch, though agreeing that this God is not Kleist's God, insists that He is "unendlich viel mehr als eine Hilfskonstruktion."[28] In the face of such diversity of interpretation concerning the nature and function of God in one particular Novelle, it becomes immediately evident that to attempt to establish a trend or spiritual progression in Kleist's works is an exceedingly involved venture.

If generalization as to Kleist's depiction of God is at all possible, it must be based on a total view of all his works. And even this tells us relatively little, for in several of them there appears to be little direct concern with God or Divine Providence. This is true, it seems to me, of Homburg, Penthesilea, Der zerbrochene Krug, Die Marquise von O . . ., and perhaps Michael Kohlhaas. In Das Käthchen God appears to be kindly intentioned, but the emphasis of the play is clearly on the reliability of "Gefühl," not on Providence. The most that can be said about Käthchen's guardian angel, presumably a concrete manifestation of Providential concern, is that 1) he is part of the standard trappings of medieval knightly romance, and

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[25]Braig, 469. [26]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 13.

[27]Clemens Lugowski, Wirklichkeit und Dichtung (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1936), pp. 159, 163.

[28]Friedrich Koch, Heinrich von Kleist, Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958), 335.

2) that his presence serves to give a kind of supernatural sanction to Käthchen's living by her "Gefühl." The play may well reflect the mood of a happier Kleist, but it is scarcely a document of its author's belief in Christian Providence.

As far as Der Zweikampf is concerned, it seems clear that God simply serves as the ultimate challenge to reliance upon "Gefühl." No other force or being in the medieval Christian framework commanded the authority which God and ecclesiastical institutions commanded. Consequently, if Kleist wished to portray "Gefühl" under the most severe attack possible, he would portray it in conflict with what appears to be the Divine judgment. The fact that these two forces are not ultimately in conflict proves nothing. What is more important is that in the time of greatest stress Littegarde is counselled to hold fast to her "Gefühl," and in so doing is vindicated. In other words, the focus of this Novelle is on the reliability of "Gefühl," not the reliability of Providence.

Walter Silz, in his latest work on Kleist, claims to perceive something of Kleist's concept of God also in Die Heilige Cäcilie and Amphitryon. Die Heilige Cäcilie shows God to be a merciless avenger, he asserts, and concerning the Jupiter of Amphitryon he states that "as a theological concept, he is the most disturbing manifestation of Kleist's uncertainty about God."[29] In response to these statements, it seems to me in the first place that God is scarcely a merciless avenger in Die Heilige Cäcilie; the brothers' behavior in the "Irrenhaus" is, after all, marked by "eine gewisse,

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[29]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), pp. 65, 68.

obschon sehr ernste und feierliche, Heiterkeit," (II, 220) and they do eventually die "eines heitern und vergnügten Todes" (II, 228). Then too, is not the primary emphasis in this Novelle upon "die Gewalt der Töne" and upon the Providential concern for and protection of the "Nonnen im Kloster der heiligen Cäcilie," and not upon punitive action taken by an avenging God? And granted that there is something awesome about the "conversion" of the brothers; does this tell us anything conclusive about Kleist's personal concept of God? Probably not.

But what about Jupiter, whom Silz sees as "the most disturbing manifestation of Kleist's uncertainty about God?" Once again, it seems to me to be questionable procedure to read too much significance into a single figure in a single work of Kleist. Furthermore, Jupiter's visit serves primarily as a test for Alkmene, a trial of her "Gefühl." To assume that in his portrayal of the god Kleist is expressing a kind of personal religious doubt simply is unwarranted.

Perhaps the only works which give relatively reliable clues as to Kleist's concept of God are Schroffenstein, Der Findling, and Das Erdbeben in Chili. And one can proceed a bit more confidently here only because the tone of these works corresponds to some extent to the tone of certain of his letters.

The God of Schroffenstein, as was noted above, is a puzzling God, whose ways remain hidden; in short, he is the "unbegreifliche" God mentioned in the letters Kleist wrote immediately following his Kantkrise. And there appears to lurk in this same work the dark suspicion that this unfathomable God may not direct the course of

events at all--whether by virtue of His impotence or His lack of interest in the affairs of men. But again, one cannot really know, for He simply does not speak "deutlich mit den Menschen." Judging by the evidence, however, it does not appear that the fact that He is makes much difference, for the world of Schroffenstein is a grim tangle, a world in which man is led to distrust, hatred, and the murder of youthful innocence.

As was noted above, the atmosphere in Der Findling is still heavier. A series of seemingly accidental occurences appears eventually to transpire at the behest of the devil himself. Evil--unmotivated, unmitigated, apparently unchecked--effectively dominates the course of events. Piachi does not bother to call on God, for He clearly enough is nowhere to be seen. It is not a case of His being unfathomable; He is plainly and simply horrible by virtue of his absence. Sacrifice and love are repaid in the world of Der Findling with unspeakable deeds of evil which remain unpunished. Beauty and goodness are annihilated by the devil incarnate. And no One cares. Let no one speak to Piachi of the moral order of the universe, or of a "fatherly Hand" guiding the workings of the world. His answer to such prattle is a refusal to take the sacrament, his bitterly unyielding resolve to go to the very depths of hell to effect continued revenge on Nicolo--himself a son of hell.

Nor does the portrayal of events in Das Erdbeben in Chili reveal the workings of a benevolent God. The Deity in this Novelle is at best an enigma. Josephe and Jeronimo, saved through "ein Wunder des Himmels," are ultimately cruelly murdered by a mob gathered for a service of thanksgiving to this same God. The very

God who seems to miraculously rescue the couple with their child appears to stand idly by as members of His church commit murder in the name of a higher piety. While protecting the innocent child of Jeronimo and Josephe from the earthquake's devastation, He allows an equally innocent child to be brutally smashed "an eines Kirchpfeilers Ecke" (II, 158). As Benno von Wiese states: "Wenn es die Gottheit ist, die durch die Begebenheit des Erdbebens und alle seine Folgen zu uns redet, so tut sie es jedenfalls nicht in einer entschlüsselbaren oder gar moralisch zuzurechnenden Weise."[30] And Blankenagel sees in this Novelle echoes of "Kleist's own early doubts and despair at the impossibility of understanding the being that rules the universe and shrouds man's destiny in mysterious darkness."[31]

Other critics tend to read Das Erdbeben in Chili in more optimistic terms, emphasizing the significance of the survival of Jeronimo and Josephe's child. "Es handelt sich um das Kind," insists Johannes Klein. "Rettung und Erziehung des Kindes . . . bilden die sittliche Gegenmacht gegen das satanisch-sinnlose Geschehen in Natur und Mensch."[32] And Hermann Pongs speaks even more strongly: "Die Vorsehung aber, die in der kosmischen Katastrophe beide Liebenden wie durch ein Legendenwunder vom sicheren Tode rettet

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[30]Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka (2 vols.; Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1956-62), II, 60.

[31]John Blankenagel, "Heinrich von Kleist: 'Das Erdbeben in Chili,'" Germanic Review, VIII (1933), 39.

[32]Johannes Klein, Geschichte der deutschen Novelle von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1960), 89.

und zusammenführt, lässt schliesslich auch im Untergang der Liebenden den absoluten Wert, der sich in dieser unbedingten Liebe erfüllt, nicht untergehen; das Kind der Liebe wird gerettet."[33]

The fact remains, however, that the life of this child was purchased with the life of "des kleinen Philipp." The same "Vorsehung" which effects the rescue of Jeronimo and Josephe's child also allows the death of Philipp, fully as innocent as the Sündenkind. Although the death of Philipp can scarcely be termed a bitter twist given the end of the Novelle, it constitutes one further bit of evidence that "der Schöpfer," to use Josephe's words, is indeed "unbegreiflich" in His workings among the children of men. His ways, in both life and death, are past finding out.

Thus the total picture to be pieced together from a survey of Kleist's works is a confusing one. To maintain on the basis of Der Findling that Kleist is totally pessimistic in outlook would be as faulty as to assert that Das Käthchen reveals his underlying belief in Divine Providence. Each of these works appears to reflect his mood at a particular time in his life, and it would be poor procedure to generalize on the basis of an appeal to either of them.

It seems to me to be more accurate to describe Kleist's view of God in the following terms. After his Kantkrise in particular, he obviously comes to the conclusion that God is puzzling and that His doings defy human comprehension. This is the testimony not only of works such as Schroffenstein and Das Erdbeben in Chili;

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[33]Hermann Pongs, Das Bild in der Dichtung (2 vols.; Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), II, 152.

this same insight is repeatedly given expression in his earlier letters. No conclusive answers to the question of meaning are to be gained from an analysis of reality as seen from day to day. If the finger of God is active in the world, it is Kleist's conviction that its workings cannot be followed by the human eye.

In view of this incomprehensibility of God, it becomes necessary to search elsewhere for meaning and guidance. Because this is Kleist's conviction, God as commonly conceived plays an insignificant role in most of the mature Kleist's works. He is at best an incalculable factor, and as such becomes basically irrelevant. Meaning is instead to be gained from adherence to "Gefühl," the voice of the Absolute which is resident deep within the person. It is because God is silent, or confusing, that another way to make sense of things must be found. And, as was seen in the fourth chapter of this study, the majority of Kleist's works tell of that way. Reliance upon "Gefühl" is his answer to the incomprehensibility of "der Wille, der über uns waltet." Thus his works portray both the question and its answer, both the problem and its solution as Kleist saw them.

In summary, the Christian view of God and His workings in the world as summarized in the first article of the Creed is for the most part quite contradictory to Kleist's view. Whereas for the orthodox Christian, God is seen personally, as Father, young Kleist, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, tends to think of Him as an impersonal force, as "der Wille, der über uns waltet," as "der Himmel." Whereas the Christian, believing the testimony of the

Scriptures, knows God to be a provident and loving Father, Kleist seems for the most part to find God inscrutable. In his earlier years he believes that the Deity is kindly disposed toward men, but this belief soon gives way to uncertainty and doubt. Although he refuses to believe that it is a "böser Geist . . . der an der Spitze der Welt steht," works such as Der Findling and Schroffenstein seem to suggest that at times he is led to wonder, to question, for perversity and destruction often appear to hold sway in a world of darkness and confusion. Thus Kleist cannot affirm a belief in Providence, in the divine direction in and of all things; he sees only confusion and menacing "Zufall." Even before his Kantkrise he sees the threat posed by "Zufall," a threat which becomes still more ominous as a result of his encounter with Kantian philosophy. Although works such as Das Käthchen von Heilbronn are markedly happier in tone, there is no firm evidence that Kleist ever comes to accept the Christian belief in Providence. He affirms instead in a tangled world reliance upon "Gefühl" as the way to the only meaning and certainty that can be achieved on earth. And because of this affirmation of "Gefühl," despair gives way to some measure, at least, of confidence and hope.

There remains the question of whether or not Kleist's religion ever was marked by the presence of pantheistic strains. In Act II, scene v of Amphitryon, Jupiter-Amphitryon, by way of suggesting that Alkmene may have aroused the displeasure of the great god Jupiter, speaks the following lines:

Ist er dir wohl vorhanden?
Nimmst du die Welt, sein grosses Werk, wohl war?

Siehst du ihn in der Abendröte Schimmer,
Wenn sie durch schweigende Gebüsche fällt?
Hörst du ihn beim Gesäusel der Gewässer,
Und bei dem Schlag der üppgen Nachtigall?
Verkündet nicht umsonst der Berg ihn dir
Getürmt gen Himmel, nicht umsonst ihn dir
Der felszerstiebten Katarakten Fall?
Wenn hoch die Sonn in seinen Tempel strahlt
Und von der Freude Pulsschlag eingeläutet,
Ihn alle Gattungen Erschaffner preisen,
Steigst du nicht in des Herzens Schacht hinab
Und betest deinen Götzen an? (I, 290, ll. 1420-33)

It is in reference to these lines that Servaes comments: "Und in Versen, die an Goethe gemahnen, offenbart Kleist durch den Mund des Gottes seine pantheistische Religion."[34]

Is there actually a significant pantheistic strain in Kleist's religious outlook? Most critics do not even discuss this question, but among those who do broach it there is, as usual, disagreement.[35] Servaes,[36] Kayka,[37] Herzog,[38] and Brahm[39] all claim to detect a pantheistic element in Kleist's belief, while Prigge-Kruhoeffer[40] and Ide are among those who insist, in Ide's words, that it is unjustifiable "in irgendeiner Weise von Pantheismus bei Kleist

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[34]Franz Servaes, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: Verlag von E. A. Seemann und der Gesellschaft für graphische Industrie, 1902), 69.

[35]See Chapter III, p. 100 of this dissertation.

[36]Servaes, 69.

[37]Ernst Kayka, Kleist und die Romantik (Berlin: A. Duncker, 1906), 128.

[38]Wilhelm Herzog, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), 631.

[39]Otto Brahm, Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist (Neue Ausgabe; Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co., 1911), 167.

[40]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 65.

zu sprechen."[41]

And Ide's position is, in my opinion, basically correct. It is quite unwarranted to assume that Kleist is voicing personal religious beliefs in the lines spoken by Jupiter, particularly since nowhere else in his writings is there substantial evidence of pantheistic thought. While it is possible, as Brahm suggests, that Kleist as a youth may have been attracted by pantheistic elements in Christian Ernst Wünsch's religious thought, there simply is no reason to believe that such elements became permanent facets of his own religion. The "Religion des Gefühls" as discussed at length in chapters three and four of this dissertation has a focus all its own, a focus on the unerring divine voice issuing from the depths of the eternal Ich. It is this source to which Kleist goes in his search for existential meaning and direction. And in the light of this sometimes desperate existential concern it becomes at most peripheral whether or not God may manifest Himself also "beim Gesäusel der Gewässer,/Und bei dem Schlag der üppgen Nachtigall."

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[41]Heinz Ide, Der junge Kleist (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1961), 232.

The Doctrine of Christ

The Traditional Christian View

> I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; The third day he arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Since the Creed gives a relatively ample statement of the traditional Christian doctrine of Christ, it is unnecessary to provide extensive explanatory comment on it at this point. It should be noted, however, that three elements in the above creedal statement are of particular interest in this study; namely those having to do with Christ's essential nature, His birth, and His death, since Kleist's writings do, in one way or another, contain comment on them.

Concerning Christ's essential nature, orthodox Christianity has always viewed Him as true God and true man. "For the right faith," according to the Athanasian Creed, "is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. . . ."[42] In His birth, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, "the eternal Son of God, who is and continues true and eternal God, took upon Himself the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Ghost. . . ."[43] And in His death He

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[42]Schaff, II, 68. [43]Schaff, III, 319.

made substitutionary atonement for the sins of man, "He took on Himself," the Catechism states, "the curse which lay upon me. . . ."[44] It is to these three aspects of the doctrine of Christ, those dealing with His nature, His birth, and His death, that the following discussion will pay particular attention.

Kleist's View of Christ

Direct comment on Christ is restricted by and large to Kleist's earlier writings and reveals a position which is in many ways typical of Enlightenment religious thought.[45] In his early essay, "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden," which was probably composed already in the year 1799, Kleist clearly does not regard Christ as the Son of God sent out by the Father in the "fulness of time." Christ is instead ranked with Socrates, Leonidas, and Regulus--all of them "grosse, seltne Menschen, aber dass wir das wissen, dass sie so berühmt geworden sind, haben sie dem Zufall zu danken, der ihre Verhältnisse so glücklich stellte, dass die Schönheit ihres Wesens wie eine Sonne daraus hervorstieg" (II, 314). In fact, he continues, "ohne den Melitus und ohne den Herodes würde Sokrates und Christus uns vielleicht unbekannt geblieben . . . sein" (II, 314). These statements speak for themselves, and obviously are directly contradictory to the tenets of orthodox Christianity. Christ is seen by Kleist to be "jener edelste und beste der Menschen," (II, 306)

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[44]Schaff, III, 320.

[45]"Der aufgeklärte Christ," according to Gerhard Kaiser, "verehrt in Christus einen höchsten menschlichen Tugendlehrer, dem nachzufolgen wohl im Bereich menschlicher Möglichkeiten liegt." (Gerhard Kaiser, Pietismus und Patriotismus im literarischen Deutschland [Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1961], 20). See also Chapter II, p. 61 of this dissertation.

not the Son of the divine Father. The conviction of the four brothers in Die heilige Cäcilie that Christ is "der wahrhaftige Sohn des alleinigen Gottes" (II, 220) clearly is not Kleist's personal conviction.

And although he states in the same essay that Christ suffered "den Tod am Kreuze für die Menschheit," (II, 306) he obviously is not voicing an orthodox Christian sentiment or affirming the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. He instead views Christ's death too in traditional Enlightenment fashion, in the spirit of late 18th century "Empfindsamkeit." Kleist does indeed depict "Christus am Kreuz" as "anbetungswürdig," (II, 606) but only as a spectacle of suffering, silent innocence, and not as the dying Son of God. Christ's death and suffering are described by Kleist in grossly sentimental terms.

> Er schlummerte unter seinen Mördern, er reichte seine Hände freiwillig zum Binden dar, die teuern Hände, deren Geschäft nur Wohltun war, er fühlte sich ja doch frei, mehr als die Unmenschen, die ihn fesselten, seine Seele war so voll des Trostes, dass er dessen noch seinen Freunden mitteilen konnte, er vergab sterbend seinen Feinden, er lächelte liebreich seine Henker an, er sah dem furchtbar schrecklichen Tode ruhig und freudig entgegen,--ach die Unschuld wandelt ja heiter über sinkende Welten. In seiner Brust muss ein ganzer Himmel von Empfindungen gewohnet haben, denn "Unrecht leiden schmeichelt grosse Seelen." (II, 306)

And who knows, he writes in another letter, "ob Christus am Kreuze getan haben würde, was er tat, wenn nicht aus dem Kreise wütender Verfolger seine Mutter und seine Jünger feuchte Blicke des Entzückens auf ihn geworfen hätten" (II, 548). Although Friedrich Braig tends to exaggerate a bit, his assessment of Kleist's sentimental concept of Christ's death is in essence quite accurate when he states that "Kleist schwelgt im Nachfühlen des ganzen Himmels von Empfindungen,

die in der Brust des sterbenden Christus gewohnt haben müssen. . . ."[46] Kleist's view of Christ's death, as seen in the quotations given above, is at heart far removed from the Christian view as stated in the Creed.

A brief sidelight in this connection. In his study entitled Kleists Todeslitanei[47] August Sauer attempts to demonstrate that in his latter days Kleist showed a tendency toward Catholic mysticism. One aspect of his argument centers about the contention that in the Abendblätter Kleist acknowledges Christ's "Persönlichkeit" more than previously, a statement ostensibly bolstered by an appeal to Reinhold Steig's Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe.[48] It is true that Steig claims that "so hat sich Kleist zu Christi Persönlichkeit bekannt,"[49] but the quotation Steig cites as evidence for the above statement is taken from the "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden," written in 1799, and not from the Abendblätter, which were published a full ten years later.[50] Two comments, then,

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[46]Braig, 11.

[47]See Chapter I, pp. 2-7 of this dissertation.

[48]See August Sauer, Kleists Todeslitanei ("Prager deutsche Studien"; Prag: Druck und Verlag von Carl Bellmann, 1907), siebentes Heft, 30.

[49]Reinhold Steig, Heinrich von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe (Berlin: Verlag von W. Spemann, 1901), 423.

[50]The quotation Steig cites is the familiar passage found in the "Aufsatz": "Blicken Sie einmal zweitausend Jahre in die Vergangenheit zurück, auf jenen besten und edelsten der Menschen, der den Tod am Kreuze für die Menschheit starb, auf Christus. Er schlummerte unter seinen Mördern, er reichte seine Hände freiwillig zum Binden dar, die teuern Hände, deren Geschäfte nur Wohltun war, er fühlte sich ja doch frei, mehr als die Unmenschen, die ihn fesselten, seine Seele war so voll des Trostes, dass er dessen noch

in regard to this matter. In the first place, since the acknowledgment of Christ's personality to which Steig refers is based on a quotation dating back to 1799, it cannot legitimately be used by Sauer as evidence of late religious concern on Kleist's part. And in the second place, since this same quotation reveals a religious orientation more akin to late Enlightenment Empfindsamkeit than to Catholic or traditional protestant thought, it can scarcely serve as evidence of a tendency toward Catholic mysticism. This element in Sauer's argument clearly is extremely tenuous.

It is not particularly surprising that Kleist's later letters do not mention Christ, since with his Kantkrise his earliest religious convictions are permanently destroyed, and with them apparently his youthful tendency toward Empfindsamkeit in religion. And in the new "Religion des Gefühls" which gradually unfolds in his letters and creative works there simply is no need for the Christ of traditional Christianity. Kleist attempts in his post-Kantian years to penetrate directly to the source of religious truth, and surely has no need, for example, of a Mediator in the Christian understanding of the term.

A third aspect of the Creedal statement which is of direct bearing in this study of Kleist's religion has to do with the person of the Virgin Mary and the doctrine of the virgin birth. Both Sauer

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seinen Freunden mitteilen konnte, er vergab sterbend seinen Feinden, er lächelte liebreich seine Henker an, er sah dem furchtbar schrecklichen Tode ruhig und freudig entgegen,--ach die Unschuld wandelt ja heiter über sinkende Welten. In seiner Brust muss ein ganzer Himmel von Empfindungen gewohnet haben." (II, 306)

and Braig comment on the significance of Kleist's alleged interest in the incarnation and in the figure of Mary, claiming it as evidence of a tendency on his part toward Roman Catholic Christianity. This apparent interest, however, can also be interpreted in a different light, as the following discussion will indicate.

Four of Kleist's letters written within a fifteen-month span contain relatively prominent reference to the Virgin Mary. The first of these letters dates back to September, 1800, the time of Kleist's stay in Würzburg, and his comments on the "Marienbilder" and the religious practices centering around them reflect his negative reaction to the entire Catholic complex he finds in that city.

> Ich, mein liebes Kind, habe Ablass auf 200 Tage. In einem Kloster auf dem Berge 2 bei b, hinter dem Zitadell, lag vor einem wundertätigen Marienbilde ein gedrucktes Gebet, mit der Ankündigung, dass wer es mit Andacht läse, diesen Ablass haben sollte. Gelesen habe ich es; doch da es nicht mit der gehörigen Andacht geschah, so werde ich mich doch wohl vor Sünden hüten, und nach wie vor tun müssen, was recht ist. (II, 555)

And later in the same letter: "Wenn die wundertätigen Marienbilder einigermassen ihre Schuldigkeit tun, so muss in kurzem kein Franzose mehr leben" (II, 556). The tone of these comments clearly reveals neither respect nor religious belief, but shows instead an attitude of mockery.

The three remaining references to the Madonna, references which are considerably more positive in tone, have to do with Kleist's appreciation of Raphael's "Mutter Gottes" which was displayed in the Dresden art gallery. In the letter dated May 21, 1801, the same letter which contains the account of his experience in the Catholic worship service, he states:

> Täglich habe ich die griechischen Ideale und die italienischen Meisterstücke besucht, und jedesmal, wenn ich in

> die Galerie trat, stundenlang vor dem einzigen Raphael dieser Sammlung, vor jener Mutter Gottes gestanden, mit dem hohen Ernste, mit der stillen Grösse, ach Wilhelmine, und mit Umrissen, die mich zugleich an zwei geliebte Wesen erinnerten. (II, 650)

In a letter written two months later he asks Karoline von Schlieben if she remembers him as he stood in the Dresden gallery "vor jener hohen Gestalt, mit der stillen Grösse, mit dem hohen Ernste, mit der Engelreinheit?" (II, 659). And in November of the same year he recalls:

> Ach, in Dresden war eine Gestalt, die mich wie ein geliebtes, angebetetes Wesen in der Galerie fesselte--und ich kann mir jetzt die Schwärmerei der alten Chevalerie, Traumgestalten wie Lebende anzubeten, sehr wohl erklären.--Ich sprach von Raphaels Mutter Gottes. (II, 701)

This experience before Raphael's "Madonna" occurs at a time of deep searching on Kleist's part. The religion of his youth has just disintegrated, leaving him restless, anxious, goal-less. "Wissen" and "Verstand" have proven unreliable guides in the search for truth and meaning; he wishes to escape "das traurige Feld der Wissenschaft" (II, 650). This is his frame of mind as he enters Dresden, views the "Madonna," and experiences the Catholic worship service.

It is clear that his fascination with the "Madonna" in Dresden is in large part due to purely emotional and esthetic factors. He feels lonely, and the outlines of the "Mutter Gottes" remind him of "zwei geliebte Wesen" from whom he has parted. And he obviously is struck by the artistry revealed in this work. He admires the painting as a glorious example of Raphael's art, as compelling evidence that "das Werk lobt seinen Meister" (II, 363). This particular work of art is for Kleist perhaps the most striking single element in "diese für mich ganz neue Welt voll Schönheit" (II, 650).

And one can also speak of a religious element in his appreciation of this masterpiece, provided a good deal of caution is exercised in the definition of terms. There clearly is nothing in Kleist's reaction to Raphael's "Madonna" which suggests an acceptance of the complex of Catholic dogma concerning the Holy Virgin. But the fact that he appears to be so keenly attracted by the tranquil sublimity he detects in her mien may well be at least in part a reflection of the anxiety resulting from his own religious uprooting. Her features attract him because they reveal the serenity of a soul at rest, the rest for which Kleist so desperately yearns "von ganzer Seele" (II, 643). She represents a realm of religious faith and certainty which Kleist himself would fain achieve. Thus he is involuntarily drawn to her. But once again, this does not mean an acceptance of Catholic dogma. It only indicates a longing for religious peace, for certainty.

Further evidence of the impact of the figure of Mary on Kleist is contained in Die Familie Schroffenstein, which was begun early in 1802, only a few months after the composition of the last three letters cited above. It is significant that in this dark tragedy Agnes, who is loved by both Johann and Ottokar, is repeatedly linked with the Holy Virgin. In his conversation with Johann, Ottokar terms her "die Ähnliche der Mutter Gottes," and thus christens her "Maria" (I, 62, ll. 320-321). Later, in the second act he addresses Agnes directly as "Maria" (I, 78, l. 787), just as he does in act three, when in response to her question as to the reason for this name, he answers: "Weil du ein Ebenbild der Mutter Gottes. . . (I, 95, ll. 1253, 1267).

No critics, with the possible exception of Friedrich Braig,[51] attribute any measure of significance to the name "Maria" as applied to Agnes, but it is interesting to pause and reflect on possible reasons for the use of this name in Schroffenstein. Maria Prigge-Kruhoeffer, the only critic to touch upon this question at any length, notes that "die Verehrung der Madonna liegt in der Zeit,"[52] and suggests that Kleist too was influenced by the "Madonnenkult" of his day. She stresses the fact that "Maria und die Kleistische Frau sind Naturwesen. . .,"[53] and that the Kleistian woman is "von unbewusstem Gefühl beseelt."[54]

Prigge-Kruhoeffer's insight at this point seems entirely plausible. When Ottokar first discovers Agnes she is almost an organic part of the bit of nature into which she is set.

> Erinnern will ich dich mit diesem Namen
> An jenen schönen Tag, wo ich dich taufte.
> Ich fand dich schlafend hier in diesem Tale,
> Das einer Wiege gleich dich bettete.
> Ein schützend Flordach webten dir die Zweige,
> Es sang der Wasserfall ein Lied, wie Federn
> Umwehten dich die Lüfte, eine Göttin
> Schien dein zu pflegen. (I, 95, ll. 1254-61)

And it is this same Agnes who is a proponent of the voice of "Gefühl" as the sole determinative in the attitude of the Ich to the Du. Thus she is, as Prigge-Kruhoeffer suggests, both an innocent child of nature, a "Naturwesen," and a loving woman dominated by "Gefühl."

One final issue which must be touched upon in this discussion of Kleist and the Christian doctrine of Christ centers about the nature of his intentions in writing Amphitryon. In 1807 Adam Müller, Kleist's close friend and a convert to Roman Catholicism, wrote the following lines to Friedrich von Gentz: "Der Amphitryon handelt ja

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[51]See Braig, 193.

[52]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 65.

[53]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 66.

[54]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 69.

wohl ebensogut von der unbefleckten Empfängnis der heiligen Jungfrau als von dem Geheimnis der Liebe überhaupt. . . ."[55] Goethe, apparently taking his cue from Müller, writes in a similar vein some two months later: "Das Stück Amphitryon von Kleist enthält nichts Geringeres als eine Deutung der Fabel ins Christliche, in die Überschattung der Maria vom Heiligen Geist."[56] And for decades this interpretation of Amphitryon remained prominent.

It is unnecessary to pursue the question of whether or not Müller's interpretation is justified at great length. Suffice it to say that in all probability Müller's comments were strictly his own, and were made without Kleist's knowledge. Moreover, Goethe's statement as quoted above apparently represents nothing more than a mere repetition of Müller's comments. If these two considerations are clearly acknowledged, it is obvious that later interpretations of the play made in the tradition of Müller and Goethe lose a good deal of their authority.

But even more importantly, to see the play as Friedrich Braig does, as an artistic restatement of the mystery of Christ's incarnation, as a celebration of the return of man to God through the medium of eternal love, is to totally distort the intent and focus of this drama. This is not to deny that Amphitryon deals with a religious problem, for it does. But the focus of this work is upon the question of whether or not there is a reliable source of truth, of religious certainty in a seemingly incomprehensible world. How can one live here below and maintain his integrity as a person? Is Gefühl reliable? These are the questions Kleist is asking in Amphitryon.

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[55]Quoted in Heinrich von Kleists Lebensspuren, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1957), 118.

[56]Kleists Lebensspuren, 124.

The basic difference between the story of the Incarnation and the visit of Jupiter can be readily seen if one examines the differing roles of the God and the child in these two accounts. Whereas in the biblical narrative the visit of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen as the supreme blessing, in Amphitryon it is first of all a test, even a trial. Thus while Mary praises the Lord wholeheartedly (Luke 1:46-55) for what He has done, Alkmene would prefer that Jupiter not visit her (ll. 1505-09). True, she is willing to accept the will of the god, but the visit he has paid her is more a source of uneasy bewilderment than of blessing. And this reflects the nature of the problem as Kleist portrays it in Amphitryon. The visit of the god is not a source of joy and hope, is not first of all an indication of providential concern, but is instead basically problematical. The question is, how can one maintain oneself in the face of what must be regarded, from Alkmene's point of view, almost as a divine challenge?

A second obvious difference has to do with the role of the child. Whereas in the biblical account the child, "Immanuel, God with us," is central, in Amphitryon his promised appearing definitely takes second place to the problem through which Alkmene suffers. The child in Kleist's drama is not the divine solution, as in the biblical account but almost seems to be an afterthought. He is at most a token of Jupiter's approval of Alkmene's having passed the test. And obviously this goes totally counter to the thrust of the gospel narrative, in which the coming appearance of the Christ is the central event, the ultimate solution.

It is true that there are parallels between the biblical narrative and Amphitryon, and that in certain of Alkmene's lines there are echoes of biblical language.[57] But to maintain that Kleist's concern is with the secret of the incarnation, as Braig does, is to distort the theme of the play. The central concern of this drama is rather the possibility of living meaningfully through reliance upon "Gefühl." And the appearance of the god Jupiter serves basically as a test and a vindication of Alkmene's "Gefühl."

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In summary, Kleist's views of Christ, His life and His death, reflect in large part the Aufklärung attitudes current in the late 18th century. Whereas in the orthodox Christian tradition Christ is seen as the Son of God sent by the Father in the fulness of time, Kleist speaks of Him merely as the noblest and best of men, whose influence and prominence are due to the accidents of history. Whereas in the tradition of the historical Christian faith His death is a substitutionary death for the salvation of sinful man, Kleist sees the crucifixion in predominately sentimental terms, as a picture of suffering innocence. Nor do his manifestations of interest in the Virgin Mary in any way reflect an acceptance on his part of Christian or specifically Roman Catholic dogma. And finally, Kleist's alleged concern with the mystery of the incarnation in Amphitryon simply is the result of misinterpretation by his critics. His intention in writing this play is instead to show the power of "Gefühl" as a religious force in human life.

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[57]See chapter III, p. 114 of this dissertation.

Sin and Man's Plight

The Traditional Christian View

> I believe . . . the forgiveness of sins. . . .

According to the teachings of historical Christianity "God created man good, and after His own image."[58] However, as a result of the fall, "we are all conceived and born in sin," in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "are wholly incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil," and thus are "prone by nature to hate God and . . . neighbor."[59]

And God, the Catechism continues, does not take sin lightly, but is "terribly displeased with our inborn as well as actual sins." "His justice requires that sin . . . be punished with . . . everlasting punishment of body and soul."[60] In other words, man's predicament, as seen within the framework of orthodox Christian thought, is hopeless. He cannot meet the demands set by God; he can only incur His displeasure in ever-increasing measure.

But divine grace, according to traditional Christian belief, meets and overcomes this situation by providing the Way of forgiveness. This Way is Christ, who takes man's place and suffers man's death. Thus the orthodox Christian believes that God cancels his sin because of the sacrificial death of His Son.

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[58]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism" as found in Schaff, III, 309.

[59]Schaff, III, 309, 310.

[60]Schaff, III, 310, 311.

Christian apologists in the Reformation tradition have always stressed the importance of the knowledge of sin and forgiveness. "For the forgiveness of sins," Barth states, "is the basis, the sum, the criterion, of all that may be called Christian life or faith."[61] And thus the position of prominence assigned in the Heidelberg Catechism to the question: "How many things are necessary for you to know, that you in this comfort may live and die happily?" and its answer: "Three things: First, the greatness of my sin and misery. Second, how I am redeemed from all my sins and misery. Third, how I am to be thankful to God for such redemption."[62]

Kleist's Views of Sin and Man's Plight

His Earlier Thought (ca. 1799-1801)

Kleist, like the writers of the Heidelberg Catechism, recognizes man's desire to "live and die happily." "Denn glücklich zu sein, das ist ja der erste aller unsrer Wünsche, der laut und lebendig aus jeder Ader und jeder Nerv unsers Wesens spricht, der uns durch den ganzen Lauf unsers Lebens begleitet" (II, 301) he writes in 1799 in his "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden." But his formula for attaining such happiness differs quite radically from the Christian way, which involves first of all a knowledge of sin and forgiveness. Kleist's early view of the nature of man and sin shows much more affinity with late 18th century Enlightenment thought than with the teachings of traditional Christianity.

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[61] Barth, Faith of the Church, 158.

[62] Schaff, III, 308.

Whereas in orthodox Christianity unredeemed man is seen first of all as sinner, "incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil," Kleist tends to emphasize man's basic goodness. Man is full well capable of walking "den Weg der Tugend," (II, 303) which is at the same time the noblest and most beautiful way to "Glück." And if one persists in walking this way, the contemplation of past deeds and present accomplishments can only result in contentment and happiness. Thus Kleist writes in the "Aufsatz":

> Ich nenne nämlich Glück nur die vollen und überschwenglichen Genüsse, die--um es mit einem Zuge Ihnen darzustellen--in dem erfreulichen Anschaun der moralischen Schönheit unseres eigenen Wesens liegen. Diese Genüsse, die Zufriedenheit unsrer selbst, das Bewusstsein guter Handlungen, das Gefühl unsrer durch alle Augenblicke unsers Lebens vielleicht gegen tausend Anfechtungen und Verführungen standhaft behaupteten Würde, sind fähig, unter allen äussern Umständen des Lebens, selbst unter den scheinbar traurigsten, ein sicheres tiefgefühltes und unzerstörbares Glück zu gründen (II, 304).[63]

And this emphasis on Kleist's part corresponds to the tendency of the religious thought of the Aufklärung. The entire 18th century was a "pelagianisches Jahrhundert"[64] to use Barth's expression. It regarded man as fundamentally and naturally good, and categorically rejected the doctrine of original sin.[65] Rousseau, whom Kleist so

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[63]Cf. Kleist's comment on his own behavior: "Und dann, wenn ich einmal auf Kosten der Bescheidenheit die Wahrheit reden will--habe ich nicht auch während meiner Anwesenheit in Frankfurt unter unsern Familien manches Gute gestiftet--? Durch untadelhaften Lebenswandel den Glauben an die Tugend bei andern stärken, durch weise Freuden sie zur Nachahmung reizen, immer dem Nächsten, der es bedarf, helfen mit Wohlwollen und Güte--ist das nicht auch Gutes wirken?" (II, 586). Note also his suggestion to Wilhelmine: "Fahre fort so aufmerksam auf Dich selbst zu sein, und wenn auch jetzt zuweilen Blicke in Dein Inneres Dich schmerzen, künftig werden sie Dich entzücken" (II, 617).

[64]Karl Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (3. Auflage; Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1960), 197.

[65]See Barth, Die protestantische Theologie, 196 ff.

greatly admired,[66] was particularly emphatic in affirming man's basic goodness. Rousseau was, according to Barth, so pronouncedly pelagian that he drew attention to himself "sogar in diesem pelagianischem Jahrhundert."[67]

While insisting upon man's essential goodness, Kleist is constrained by experience to recognize the presence of sin and evil in the world. Nevertheless, the forces of virtue are clearly superior, in his early thought, to the forces of evil. "Ach und wenn sich auch im ganzen Umkreis der Erde nur ein einziger Tugendhafter fände, dieser einzige wiegt ja eine ganze Hölle von Bösewichtern auf. . ." (II, 312). And the situation is not really that bad, the force of evil is not that pervasive in man. Thus he states in January, 1801, that it is "der Charakter der Menschheit . . . nicht ganz vollkommen zu sein" (II, 618)--surely a classic understatement, from the orthodox Christian point of view! And in contrast to the traditional concept of man's fall, Kleist in his "Aufsatz" cautions against thinking that "die Menschen seien von ihrer Höhe herabgesunken. . ." (II, 314). Consequently, it is well within the realm of possibility "der Erde tugendhafte Menschen zu erziehen," (II, 318) and in a letter to Wilhelmine he envisions "ein einziges Bild--Dich, Wilhelmine, und zu Deinen Füssen zwei Kinder, und auf Deinem Schosse ein drittes . . . und . . . [ich] sehe, wie Du ohne viel zu plaudern, durch Beispiele Gutes lehrst und wie Du ihnen in Dienem eignen Bilde zeigst, was Tugend ist, und wie liebenswürdig sie ist. . ." (II, 577).

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[66]See footnote 48, p. 67, Chapter II of this dissertation.

[67]Barth, Die protestantische Theologie, 197.

Kleist is not able, however, to maintain this degree of optimism. Already in October of 1800 he writes that "das Ersteigen der Berge, wie der Weg zur Tugend, ist . . . beschwerlich" (II, 580). And when he arrives in Paris in the summer of 1801 and observes the French, he is well nigh overwhelmed by the spectacle of "ihre Greuel und ihre Laster. . ." (II, 659).

> Verrat, Mord und Diebstahl sind hier ganz unbedeutende Dinge, deren Nachricht niemanden affiziert. Ein Ehebruch des Vaters mit der Tochter, des Sohnes mit der Mutter, ein Totschlag unter Freunden und Anverwandten sind Dinge, dont on a eu d'exemple, und die der Nachbar kaum des Anhörens würdigt. (II, 686)

But at no time does he explicitly negate his original conviction that man is at heart good, and not "prone to hate God and neighbor."

Given the above emphases, one would scarcely expect that Kleist accept the orthodox view of God's attitude toward sin, namely that it must "be punished with . . . everlasting punishment of body and soul." He is convinced that there is an impersonal system of punishment and reward built into the universe. "Da waltet ein grosses unerbittliches Gesetz über die ganze Menschheit, dem der Fürst wie der Bettler unterworfen ist," he writes in 1799. "Der Tugend folgt die Belohnung, dem Laster die Strafe" (II, 307). And in reaction to the horrible sight of an 18 year old, "den ein unnatürliches Laster wahnsinnig gemacht hatte," he is led to exclaim: "So schrecklich rächt die Natur den Frevel gegen ihren eignen Willen!" (II, 560, 561). But this is a kind of immanent justice, not the justice required by a righteous God of the creatures of His hand. Thus the issue of punishment and reward is also seen by Kleist primarily in terms of this world. "Ich fürchte nicht die Höllenstrafe der Zukunft, weil ich mein eignes Gewissen fürchte,

und rechne nicht auf einen Lohn jenseits des Grabes, weil ich ihn mir diesseits desselben schon erwerben kann!" (II, 318).

The problem of sin and punishment has still another facet. Particularly after his Kantkrise Kleist comes to the awareness that it is extremely difficult to discriminate between good and evil. "Was heisst das auch, etwas Böses tun, der Wirkung nach? Was ist böse? Absolut Böse?" (II, 683). And if these questions cannot be answered with certainty, can man be held responsible for the evil he does? "Wenn man seit Jahrtausenden noch zweifelt, ob es ein Recht gibt--kann Gott von solchen Wesen Verantwortlichkeit fordern? Man sage nicht," he continues, "dass eine Stimme im Innern uns heimlich und deutlich anvertraue, was recht sei. Dieselbe Stimme, die dem Christen zuruft, seinem Feinde zu vergeben, ruft dem Seeländer zu, ihn zu braten, und mit Andacht isst er ihn auf" (II, 683). In such a world of faulty vision, punishment simply does not make sense. And surely not the traditional Christian concept of "everlasting punishment of body and soul."

The orthodox Christian recognizes not only the reality of sin and the Divine displeasure. He also believes that there is a way out, the way of grace, of forgiveness--the gift of God. Kleist's way to "Glück" takes a totally different route. It is the way of 18th century "autonomous man" who is quite confident that he can manage for himself. Thus Kleist speaks approvingly of his friend Brockes: "Er bestimmt nach seiner Vernunft, welches Glück für ihn das höchste sei, er entwirft sich seinen Lebensplan, und strebt seinem Ziele nach sicher aufgestellten Grundsätzen mit allen seinen Kräften entgegen. Denn schon die Bibel sagt," Kleist adds,

"willst du das Himmelreich erwerben, so lege selbst Hand an" (II, 489). Just as "Vernunft" commends to us the various virtues, so the construction of a "Lebensplan," "das Werk Deiner Vernunft," will insure harmony between duty and inclination, between word and deed (II, 491). The adherence to such a "Lebensplan" gives "Ruhe und Sicherheit" (II, 490). No gifts are needed; no atoning Mediator is required. One simply sets his goal, as dictated by "Vernunft," and then bends all of his energies to the pursuit of that goal. Prigge-Kruhoeffer is right; the younger Kleist has no interest in grace.

> Das Glück ist für ihn keine Gnade, die dem Demütigen herabströmt, sondern seine überempfindliche Menschwürde fordert Gerechtigkeit von den ewigen Weltgesetzen--keine unverstandene, der gütigen Gottheit vertrauensvoll anheimgestellte Gerechtigkeit, sondern eine klar erkannte, gesetzmässig verlaufende Gerechtigkeit, eine "ewige Wahrheit," auf der man die Sicherheit des Lebens aufbauen kann.[68]

The way to "Ruhe" and "Sicherheit" is not the way of forgiveness. It is the way of self-assertion guided and channeled by the dictates of "Vernunft." The only subjection to which "ein freier Mann" can submit is to the "Herrschaft der Vernunft" (II, 491).

As was noted in chapter three of this dissertation, Kleist's earlier confidence in "Wissen" as a source of religious truth gives way after the Kantkrise to a temporary reliance upon nature. "Falsch ist jedes Ziel," he writes in June, 1801, "das nicht die reine Natur dem Menschen steckt" (II, 654). But this adoption of a new religious authority does not involve the affirmation of grace any more than was previously the case. Blessedness simply involves inquiring of nature as to the direction of its will, and then resolving to work in that direction.

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[68]Prigge-Kruhoeffer, 23.

This same emphasis is evident in the stress Kleist lays on the fulfillment of duty, of "Pflicht." "Erfülle Deine Pflicht; . . . dieser Satz enthält die Lehren aller Religionen" he admonishes Wilhelmine in September of 1800 (II, 317). He feels that it is his "Pflicht" to leave military service, (II, 485) that it is Ulrike's "heilige Pflicht" to marry and bear children, (II, 493) and that it may well be his "Pflicht" to terminate his relationship with Wilhelmine (II, 667). "Das Gefühl seiner Pflicht"--that is the one thing in man which, in the face of change, remains "unwandelbar und ewig" (II, 515). This emphasis on the fulfillment of duty not only reflects the ethical thrust of the 18th century Aufklärung, but also mirrors the attitude of "autonomous man" as he seeks to work out his own salvation, without the benefit of grace.

His Later Thought (ca. 1801-1811)

Kleist's later concepts of sin and man's plight are perhaps a bit more difficult to fix than were his earlier ideas on this subject, since his letters written after 1801 contain practically no direct comment on this matter. Consequently one must rely primarily on the testimony of his works in further investigating the question at hand, and this of necessity involves interpretation of his dramas and Novellen. Nevertheless, it seems to me that an examination of Kleist's works does provide a fairly clear picture of the tendency of his later thought in relation to the question of sin and man's basic predicament.

Let it be said first of all that the more mature Kleist is fully conscious of the pervasiveness of evil and misery in the world. "Was ist dies für eine Welt?" he asks in a letter written in November,

1806. "Jammer und Elend so darin verwebt, dass der menschliche Geist sie nicht einmal in Gedanken davon befreien kann" (II, 772). The world of Schroffenstein and Der Findling, as previously noted, is a world in which various forms of devilishness are painfully prominent. And Kleist's other works too indicate an awareness on his part that the impact of evil in this world is only too evident. Die Verlobung in St. Domingo is set against a background of warfare between two races, and Das Erdbeben in Chili ends with a brutal multiple murder. In Die Marquise von O . . . rape plays a central role, while Der Zweikampf begins with fratricide. Michael Kohlhaas finds himself the victim of injustice and petty bureaucratic intrigue, and consequently feels contrained to mete out punishment "mit Feuer und Schwert" in a world sunk in "Arglist." And even in the relatively happy atmosphere of Das Käthchen von Heilbronn Theobald Friedeborn testifies: "Ich erlitt in drei und funfzig Jahren, da ich lebe, so viel Unrecht, dass meiner Seele Gefühl nun gegen seinen Stachel wie gepanzert ist. . ." (I, 431,11.24ff.).

However, it is one thing to recognize the prominence of evil in human life, and quite another to see it in Christian terms, in terms of sin and forgiveness. And this Kleist simply does not do. Although evil in his works is an obvious and lamentable factor, his primary concern is not with personal guilt and redemption from sin. The focus in his works is instead upon the possibility or impossibility of making sense in the face of cosmic incomprehensibility, of maintaining the person in the face of a variety of menacing factors, and of communicating with others in a world which seems to promote isolation and loneliness.

Many of Kleist's figures tend to be prominent more by virtue of their innocence, their basic uprightness, than by character shortcomings. Take, for example, Die Marquise von O . . . . If Kleist were interested first of all in the problem of sin or guilt, he would have infused this Novelle with a totally different tone. But as things stand, the Marquise conquers "durch die Kraft ihres schuldfreien Bewusstseins," (II, 126) and even of her dastardly violation at the hands of the Graf we are told that it is "die einzige nichtswürdige Handlung, die er in seinem Leben begangen hätte. . ." (II, 112). The Marquise's problem, which obviously is the central problem of the Novelle, arises not because of her guilt, but because of the fact that empirical evidence contradicts her sure innocence, and thus the world becomes "unbegreiflich." Kleist's central concern is not with the consciousness of personal sin, but with the challenge of living meaningfully in an incomprehensible world.

A similar situation prevails in Der Zweikampf. It is precisely because Littegarde is innocent, "die unbescholtenste und makelloseste Frau des Landes," (II, 235) that the seeming verdict of the "Gottesurteil" brings her to the brink of madness. Again, the problem is not one of overcoming guilt or of achieving forgiveness; it is a problem of self-maintenance in a threatening world. And this is accomplished through reliance upon "Gefühl."

Likewise, Käthchen stands out as "gesund an Leib und Seele, wie die ersten Menschen, die geboren worden sein mögen; ein Kind recht nach der Lust Gottes. . ." (I, 432, ll. 65ff.). But once again, her bearing does not first of all testify to her "sinlessness," as traditionally understood, or to the power of forgiveness, but to the

unerring guidance of "Gefühl" in a confusing world. And the same is true of Alkmene, who in reliance upon her "Gefühl" reveals herself to be "so urgemäss dem göttlichen Gedanken, / In Form und Mass, und Sait und Klang" (I, 294, ll. 1572-73).

And finally there is the case of Kohlhaas, whose attitudes and behavior run decisively counter to the teachings of Christianity, and consitute an outright negation of the Christian injunction to forgive and thus be forgiven. At no time does Kohlhaas appear to be tormented by guilt feelings, by the consciousness of his own sin. We read instead that "mitten durch den Schmerz, die Welt in einer so ungeheuren Unordnung zu erblicken, zuckte die innerliche Zufriedenheit empor, seine eigne Brust nunmehr in Ordnung zu sehen" (II, 24). Thus his grim determination to wreak vengeance on his enemy stands under the sign of justice, not of forgiveness. And his ultimate affirmation of his own death is not the result of penitence or primarily the recognition of personal guilt. His eyes shine instead because he has procured justice, and in so doing has established his own right to be.

Thus the focus of none of these works is on guilt and grace, on sin and forgiveness. This simply is not Kleist's prime concern. He defines the basic problems of human existence in other terms, and propounds a solution quite outside the framework of traditional Christian thought and belief. This solution is adherence to the absolute, divine interior principle and the affirmation of the Ich. Thus to insist that his ultimate concern is with the concepts of "Erbsünde" and "Erlösung," as Friedrich Braig does,[89] is totally unwarranted.

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[69]Cf. Chapter I, pp. 10ff. of this dissertation.

The question of whether or not Kleist persists in his belief in the essential goodness of man cannot be answered by a simple appeal to any one of his works. There is some indication that he continued to be influenced for some time by Rousseau's thought. For example, in Das Erdbeben in Chili, the Novelle in which men show themselves at their hideous worst, there is also found a kind of nature-idyll. It is as though with the destruction of all the forms of civilization mankind flowers "wie eine schöne Blume," (II, 152) and reveals what it really could be. Where social distinctions had previously dominated, men now identified with each other as members of "eine Familie" (II, 152). Moving deeds of bravery, generosity, and self-sacrifice become, for the moment, commonplace. But only for the moment. As soon as the forms of civilization begin to be re-established, old ways return and the brief moment of paradise is transformed into hellishness.

A similar echo can be noted in Schroffenstein, where Agnes, a child of nature, is at the same time convinced that only if immediate certainty as to "der Seelengüte andrer" reigns can there be harmony and reconciliation between men. But in this drama, at least, disruptive "Misstrauen," "die schwarze Sucht der Seele," reveals itself in its perverse and overpowering infectiousness. Belief in "der Seelengüte andrer" is quite effectively overshadowed by lurid manifestations of human perversity--aided and abetted by an unfathomable but apparently malevolent universe.

Kleist's later works contain considerably less evidence of Rousseau's influence. But once again, this is not because he has lost faith in man. This surely is not the testimony of a work such

as Homburg. He seems instead for the most part to assume that, given man as he is, he will be able to rightly fulfill his destiny, provided he is atune to the eternal Ground of his being.

Predictably enough, Friedrich Braig reads Der zerbrochene Krug in terms of the Christian concepts of sin and salvation. "Der tragende Grund" of this comedy, according to Braig, is "das sündige Sein des Menschen und sein Zusammenhang mit der Schicksalsfrage."[70] The central thought of the play, he insists, has to do with original sin and the possibility of redemption.

To thus interpret this comedy is obviously to do gross violence to the work as it is written. The burden of both this play and Die Verlobung in St. Domingo concerns the possibility of establishing communion between persons. This drama may well reflect Kleist's longing for communication with his fellows, but to see in it a reflection of his longing for redemption in Christian terms requires considerable imagination on the part of the reader.

There remains, of course, Der Findling, in which the power of evil is portrayed with particular poignancy. It is in my opinion unwarranted, however, to ascribe undue significance to this work in an investigation of Kleist's ideas as to the nature of man and the power of evil in the world. The figure of Nicolo, total depravity incarnate, surely is not a representative figure in Kleist's works. He stands quite alone, and among the main figures created by Kleist clearly is the exception, not the rule. There are other characters in his dramas and Novellen who act destructively, but none of them are as totally perverse, as fully bent upon evil for

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[70]Braig, 172.

its own sake, as is Nicolo. Thus he can only be regarded as a product of his creator's temporary, though severe, pessimism.

What about the "gebrechliche Einrichtung der Welt" as cited both in Michael Kohlhaas and Die Marquise von O . . .? It seems to me that this term is not used by Kleist first of all to signify the power of sin or of evil in the world. "Die gebrechliche Einrichtung der Welt" points instead, in my opinion, to the fact that appearances are deceptive, to put it simply, that "die Wahrscheinlichkeit nicht immer auf Seiten der Wahrheit ist" (II, 96). Müller-Seidel is right in suggesting that "die gebrechliche Einrichtung der Welt" has to do with the "Als-Ob-Charakter dieser Welt,"[71] and thus with its incomprehensibility. It is in recognition of this inescapable element in the character of human existence that Kohlhaas turns about and goes home in order to listen to Herse's version of what has happened instead of proceeding directly to Dresden to file charges against Wenzel von Tronka, for one simply cannot judge by the face of things. And similarly, the Graf in Die Marquise von O . . . feels that he is forgiven "um der gebrechlichen Einrichtung der Welt willen" (II, 143). That is to say, things being as they are, one simply cannot know with certainty, and it is therefore in order to make allowances.

Since Kleist's central concern in his years of maturity is not, as has been repeatedly emphasized, with the reality of sin and the need for redemption and divine grace, it is in no way

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[71] Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen, 139.

surprising that he is not concerned with Christ, the Vehicle of that grace. Sin does not stand, in the framework of his religion, between man and God; consequently, there is no need of a Mediator. One can instead penetrate directly to the divine Source of meaning, the Absolute as manifest deep within, and there discover the way in a baffling world. The basic emphasis of Braig's work represents a total distortion of the nature of Kleist's religious concern. That he sought meaning, ultimate sanctions, religious certainty--all of this is indeed true. But it is equally obvious that the direction of his search did not lead him along the Christian way as traditionally understood, the way of grace and divine forgiveness.

A word is in order, at this point, concerning Kleist's essay Über das Marionettentheater, first published in December of 1810 in the Abendblätter. The significance of this short work has been emphasized by many Kleist scholars. Hanna Hellmann, for example, maintains that an understanding of this essay provides the key to the secret of all of his thought,[72] and Gerhard Fricke is convinced that it comprises Kleist's only attempt to give theoretical expression to "das unsichtbare Zentrum all seiner Dichtung."[73]

Although there appears to be some concensus as to the significance of this essay, there is little agreement as to how it should be interpreted. Just what does Kleist mean by man's loss of innocence, and what is the nature of the "unendliches Bewusstsein"

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[72]Hanna Hellmann, Heinrich von Kleist: Darstellung des Problems (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1911), 2ff.

[73]Fricke, 150.

which must be attained if paradise is to be regained? Friedrich Braig sees "das unendliche Bewusstsein" as the result of belief in the revealed truth of Christianity, thus claiming to detect in the Marionettentheater evidence of Kleist's concern with the "Mysterium der Erlösung."[74] Günter Blöcker, on the other hand, terms the essay Kleist's "Apotheose des Unbewussten,"[75] and interprets the return to paradise as standing "im Zeichen des souverän gewordenen Menschen. Das absolute Ich," he asserts, "tritt seine Herrschaft an, unbeeinträchtigt vom Bewusstsein des Endlichen, sicher beheimatet in der Ewigkeit des Seins und ausgestattet mit der Anmut der Unschuld und der Unfehlbarkeit des Spontanen."[76] Fricke's views differ from those of both Braig and Blöcker; he sees in the second stage of man's history the domination of finite, subjective "Gefühl," which, in the final stage, is to give way to the "Herrschaft des ewigen Gefühls."[77] And Paul Böckmann, a fourth interpreter, sees the third stage, the ideal, to be "die heroische Haltung," a posture in which action precedes reflection. "Das Bewusstsein," he writes, "muss zum unendlichen Bewusstsein werden, indem es sich selbst die Grenze bestimmt und einsieht, dass es nie über dem Leben steht. . . ."[78] And one could go on at great length noting the varying emphases in individual interpretations of this essay.

Although Braig's interpretation of the Marionettentheater simply is untenable, he is correct in pointing to its general

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[74]Braig, 545.

[75]Blöcker, 189

[76]Blöcker, 196.

[77]Fricke, 152.

[78]Paul Böckmann, "Kleists Aufsatz über das Marionettentheater," Euphorion, XXVIII (1927), 251.

religious significance. For in this essay Kleist is making reference to man's plight, his "fall," as he sees it, and to the remedy for man's ensuing predicament. But once again, as was the case in his other works, Kleist does not see the religious issue within the traditional Christian framework of guilt and grace, of sin and forgiveness. Nor does he view it, for example, essentially in terms of Rousseauan thought. As Xylander notes: "Kleists Weg von der verlorenen Unschuld des Paradieses zum neuen 'Stand der Unschuld' im 'unendlichen Bewusstsein' lässt sich mit Rousseaus 'Zurück zur Natur' und seiner Antithese von Natur und Reflexion nicht zu wirklicher Deckung bringen."[79] Kleist's assessment of the problem and its solution is uniquely his own.

Since man has eaten of the "Baum der Erkenntnis," according to the Marionettentheater, the curse of reflection, of "Bewusstsein" rests on all of his thought and activity. Consequently he has lost his "natürliche Grazie," his innocence as it originally issued from the unity of his being. That unity has given way to disunity, to fragmentation, to inner conflict. Thus man's center of gravity has shifted so that his soul, like that of the dancer F. . ., "sitzt ihm gar (es ist ein Schrecken, es zu sehen) im Ellenbogen" (II, 342). His natural grace has become awkwardness, and the more he consciously attempts to regain it, the more ludicrous and unlovely he becomes. As long as he is burdened by the distorting curse of consciousness, he cannot meet life either gracefully or successfully. As was the case with the fencer in combat with the bear, all of his attempts to

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[79] Oskar Ritter von Xylander, Heinrich von Kleist und J. J. Rousseau ("Germanische Studien," Heft 93; Berlin: Verlag Emil Ebering, 1937), 366.

feint his way through life will be in vain. Every effort to master life through reflection will come to naught.

But there is a remedy for this situation: "So findet sich auch, wenn die Erkenntnis gleichsam durch ein Unendliches gegangen ist, die Grazie wieder ein"(II, 345). It is extremely difficult to identify the rather vague "Unendliches" of which Kleist speaks. Each critic defines it differently. The result of this process of passing through an infinite, however, is quite evident: regained "Grazie," apparently issuing from restored unity. To suggest, as Braig does, that Kleist sees such unity as the result of acceptance of the Christian way of salvation reveals a greater degree of imagination than critical perspicacity. Nothing in the text serves to validate such an interpretation.

But what then is the burden of Das Marionettentheater? Several aspects of this essay remain obscure, but one thing is certain: Kleist does not advocate a total cancellation of man's reflective capacity, even if it were a possibility. He rather seeks an integrating force, one which will take man in his present condition, utilize his various capabilities, and make him as he ought to be--unified, graceful, in harmony with himself and thus with the world. His "Bewusstsein" must pass through "ein Unendliches," so that his entire self will emerge re-integrated. This integrating factor is "Gefühl," the voice of the eternal Ich, the voice of God, as it restores focus and shows the way in the here and now.

Although this process may at some points parallel the Christian concept of rebirth, the two are not to be identified. Not mere consciousness or reflection, in the Christian framework, has caused

man's disunity, but it is willed disobedience which serves to alienate him from the unifying Source of his existence. Consequently reunification, reunion involves the removal of the source and product of alienation, which is not consciousness, but sin. In other words, forgiveness must occur. Re-eating of the "Baum der Erkenntnis" involves for Kleist the establishment of contact with the eternal Ich, as the manifestation of the divine Ground of being, an occurence in which grace (Gnade) plays no role. Reorientation for the orthodox Christian means reunion with the Father at His own behest, reunion made possible as the result of His own infinite mercy.

In summary, I believe the Marionettentheater to be a symbolic-theoretical restatement of the theme of all of Kleist's works, namely salvation through adherence to "Gefühl," the voice of the Eternal. This process of salvation, it should be repeated, differs from the Christian way, for essential to it is neither penitence nor forgiveness, neither sin nor grace. In other words, this essay merely confirms the composite testimony of Kleist's dramas and Novellen, the testimony that his religious orientation stands essentially apart from the thought and tradition of orthodox Christianity.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS AND THE CHURCH

The Traditional Christian View

> I believe a holy, catholic Church,
> the communion of saints. . . .

In the orthodox Christian tradition the members of the Church claim a dual communion. They consider themselves in the first place "members of Christ"[1] and thus in communion with Him. Or as Karl Barth puts it: "The Word of God Himself . . . by becoming flesh chose, called and received all who believe in Him into unity with Himself. . . ."[2] And second, because the Church is a body, Christ's body, its members also believe themselves to be in organic union with one another. United by a common calling and a common concern, the members of the Church enjoy the benefits of communion and community. Although the integrity of the individual is to be respected, he does not, according to traditional Christian thought, exist in isolation. Since he is a member of the body of believers, his concern is the concern of all. In the words of St. Paul: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one

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[1]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism" as found in Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (3 vols., 4th edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), III, 325.

[2]Karl Barth, Credo (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 141.

member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (I Cor. 12:26). Thus the Christian is part of a larger Whole, sharing the concern of his fellow members and involving himself in the common service to which the community of believers feels itself called.

Kleist's View

Communion and Alienation

Nowhere in his writings does Kleist react specifically to the traditional Christian concept of communion. And one would scarcely expect that he make theological pronouncements on this matter, since his central concern, particularly in his more mature years, is not with Christianity or its dogma. The tendency of his later thought is basically extra-Christian, not anti-Christian. Thus Kleist's attitudes regarding the problems of communication and the establishment of communion, though surely not intended as a refutation of Christian thought or practice, reflect a perspective and emphasis quite alien to those of traditional Christianity. But these emphases do constitute elements in his own peculiar Weltschau, and hence merit treatment in this study.

The Witness of Kleist's Letters

Whereas according to Christian doctrine the individual believer is not, so to speak, his own, but rather finds his essence in belonging to a saving God and consequently also to His Church, it is part of the tragedy of Kleist's life that he does not "belong," but tends instead to stand lonely and alone. To state this is not

to say anything new, for his "Outsiderschaft" and "Einsamkeit" have always been recognized and emphasized by critics and scholars of every stripe, one of whom is Friedrich Gundolf, who is quite outspoken in his hostility toward Kleist:

> Der Beziehungslosigkeit zwischen Kleists Seele und der Welt, seiner "Einsamkeit," die er durch Vergewaltigung, durch Überspannung, durch Verklammerung aufzuheben suchte,--dieser angebornen Abgesondertheit des Kleistischen Genies begegnen wir überall, in seinen Charakteren, in seinen Handlungen, in seiner Grammatik, wie in seiner Bildersprache.[3]

Gundolf goes so far as to term him "der einsamste deutsche Dichter."[4]

Is this "Einsamkeit," this alienation of Kleist's own choosing? Rudolf Ibel seems to suggest that in a way it was. "Um dieses 'Innerste der Seele,'" he writes, "aber frei von allen Schlacken und Missverständnissen überlieferter und herrschender Geistesformen in sich zu entwickeln und wirksam werden zu lassen, ging er den Weg des trotzigen Einsamen, der sich keiner Gesellschaft und keiner der gegebenen Formen fügte."[5] Both Ide and Reusner, on the other hand, while agreeing that he stands outside of "allen traditionellen und konventionellen Ordnungen,"[6] stress his keenly felt need for "Gemeinschaft," for "die Beziehung . . . zum Du."[7] Thus Ide writes:

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[3]Friedrich Gundolf, Heinrich von Kleist (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1922), 42.

[4]Gundolf, 15.

[5]Rudolf Ibel, Heinrich von Kleist--Schicksal und Botschaft (Hamburg: Holsten-Verlag, 1961), 49.

[6]Heinz Ide, Der junge Kleist (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1961), 136.

[7]Ernst von Reusner, Satz-Gestalt-Schicksal ("Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker," Neue Folge, Vol. VI; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1961), 50.

> Andrerseits hat er den stärksten inneren Zug nicht nur zum Mitmenschen, sondern auch zur Gemeinschaft und zum Wirken in ihr. Neu Gemeinschaft, auch die staatliche, möglich zu machen, ist geradezu eine von seiner persönlichen Existenznot ganz unabtrennbare Lebensaufgabe.[8]

And Reusner:

> Er hat von Anfang an ein gestörtes Verhältnis zum Du, überhaupt zu allem Nicht-ich, von dem er sich aber nicht lösen kann, ohne sich selbst zu vernichten, weil der Mensch, wie er erlebt hat und wie er es leben muss, nur in diesen Bindungen existiert. So sieht er als Aufgabe vor sich, den Weg zum Du zu finden. . . .[9]

Although Ibel's assertion that he goes "den Weg des trotzigen Einsamen" is to a certain extent true, particularly of the younger Kleist, it certainly would be misleading to suggest that he wills or affirms his own acute loneliness. Federn is correct in maintaining that "Kleist war von Natur weder ein einsamer noch ein verschlossener Mensch; er fühlte tief den Drang, sich mitzuteilen, und litt unter der unvollkommenen Möglichkeit und dem Missverständnis; er litt unter der Einsamkeit."[10]

Kleist's letters clearly reveal traces of his alienation. Not only did he experience acute difficulty in communicating with strangers in a social situation; his relations with his friends and family, and even with his fiancee, Wilhelmine von Zenge, all reflect his feeling of alienation and his desperate fear of loneliness.

Kleist and His Family

In a letter to his sister Ulrike dated February 25, 1795, Kleist takes note of letters he has received from various members

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[8]Ide, 135. [9]Reusner, 72.

[10]Karl Federn, Das Leben Heinrich von Kleists (Berlin: Brückenverlag, 1929), 68.

of his family,[11] and expresses appreciation for their interest and concern:

> Gustchens Brief, und der Brief von der Tante Massow und der Nogier haben mir ein gleich lebhaftes Vergnügen gemacht. Sie beweisen mir alle eine gleiche Teilnahme an meine Lage, und ich muss meine Erkenntlichkeit teilen.[12]

He appears in this early letter to express himself openly, to identify quite naturally with his family, and to be conscious of no exceptional difficulties in communicating with it.

But this situation soon changes and Kleist's relationship with his family eventually becomes increasingly problematical. To Christian Ernst Martini he reports in March, 1799, that he has told only his sister Ulrike the details of his "Lebensplan," feeling that as for the rest of his family, "mich ihnen ganz zu eröffnen, war . . . nicht ratsam" (II, 473). It is not in the first place antagonism or distrust which separates him from them; they simply cannot, he feels, understand him. Ulrike is the only member of his family, he repeats, "die mich ganz verstehen kann" (II, 486).

Kleist's feeling of alienation from his family becomes increasingly pronounced as the years go by. In January of 1802, after his Kantkrise and trip to Paris, he writes:

> Auch Tante und die Geschwister sollen mir wieder gut werden, o gewiss! Denn erzürnt sind sie auf mich, ich fühle es wohl, nicht einmal einen Gruss schenken sie dem Entfernten. Ich aber drücke mich an ihre Brust und weine, dass das Schicksal, oder mein Gemüt--und ist das nicht mein Schicksal? eine Kluft wirft zwischen mich und sie. (II, 715)

And later in the same year he makes a similar statement, reproaching

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[11]Both of Kleist's parents died prior to this time, his father in 1788 and his mother in 1793.

[12]Werke, II, 470. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, volume and page references to Kleist's Werke will be made in parentheses.

himself in addition as responsible for the cleavage which has developed between his family and himself. Thus he writes Ulrike: "Möchte Dich der Himmel doch nur glücklich in die Arme der Deinigen geführt haben! Warum sage ich nicht, der Unsrigen? Und wenn es die Meinigen nicht sind, wessen ist die Schuld, als meine?" (II, 727).

Kleist certainly is not indifferent or callous in the face of this unfortunate estrangement. As one reads his letters it becomes obvious that he yearns for the love and respect of his family. In June, 1801, he terms himself "ein Mensch, der in seiner Familie alles fand, was ein Herz binden kann, Liebe, Vertrauen, Schonung, Unterstützung mit Rat und Tat," (II, 655) and reproaches himself for the thoughtlessness he has demonstrated in his dealings with his family. "Und doch sind sie mir die liebsten und teuersten Menschen auf der Welt!" (II, 655). Expressions of affection for his family can also be found in later letters. In March of 1803, for example, he closes a letter to Ulrike with the following request: "Und nun küsse in meinem Namen jeden Finger meiner ewig verehrungswürdigen Tante! Und, wie sie, den Orgelpfeifen gleich, stehen, küsse sie alle von der obersten bis zur letzten, der kleinen Maus aus dem Apfelkern[13] geschnitzt!" (II, 731). And in the very last days of his life he writes:

> Ich habe meine Geschwister immer, zum Teil wegen ihrer gutgearteten Persönlichkeiten, zum Teil wegen der Freundschaft, die sie für mich hatten, von Herzen lieb gehabt; so wenig ich davon gesprochen habe, so gewiss ist es, dass es einer meiner herzlichsten und innigsten Wünsche war, ihnen einmal, durch meine Arbeiten und Werke, recht viel Freude und Ehre zu machen. (II, 883)

Not only does he long for the affection of his family; he also seeks its respect. His Guiskard represents, in his own words,

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[13]A reference to the baby recently born to his sister Gustchen.

an attempt "zu so vielen Kränzen noch einen auf unsere Familie herabzuringen. . ." (II, 735). Thus when he is unable to complete this drama he writes to Ulrike: "Ich kann mich Deiner Freundschaft nicht würdig zeigen, ich kann ohne diese Freundschaft doch nicht leben: ich stürze mich in den Tod" (II, 737). And in the final days of his life he states that among his reasons for dying is the fact that his family has lost all respect for him:

> Der Gedanke, das Verdienst, das ich doch zuletzt, es sei nun gross oder klein, habe, gar nicht anerkannt zu sehn, und mich von ihnen als ein ganz nichtsnutziges Glied der menschlichen Gesellschaft, das keiner Teilnahme mehr wert sei, betrachtet zu sehn, ist mir überaus schmerzhaft, wahrhaftig, es raubt mir nicht nur die Freuden, die ich von der Zukunft hoffte, sondern es vergiftet mir auch die Vergangenheit. (II, 883)

Thus he leaves this world of "Einsamkeit," of broken relationships, fleeing instead to "jene bessere Welt, wo wir uns alle, mit der Liebe der Engel, einander werden ans Herz drücken können" (II, 888).

There is one member of his immediate family, however, with whom Kleist can communicate--his sister Ulrike. She remains patiently loyal to him and, to some extent at least, understands him. Thus Ulrike is the only member of the family whom he informs fully of his new "Lebensplan" (II, 473). "Sie ist die einzige von meiner Familie," he writes to Martini in March, 1799, "der ich mich ganz anzuvertrauen schuldig bin, weil sie die einzige ist, die mich ganz verstehen kann" (II, 486). It is because he wishes to be near her, he writes in May, 1799, that he decides to attend the University in Frankfurt.

> Denn Grundsätze und Entschlüsse wie die meinigen, bedürfen der Unterstützung, um über so viele Hindernisse und Schwierigkeiten unwandelbar hinausgeführt zu werden. Du, mein liebes Ulrikchen, sicherst mir den guten Erfolg derselben. Du bist die einzige die mich hier ganz versteht. (II, 487)

And in November of the same year:

> Verstanden wenigstens möchte ich gern zuweilen sein, wenn auch nicht aufgemuntert und gelobt, von einer Seele wenigstens möchte ich gern zuweilen verstanden werden, wenn auch alle andern mich verkennen. Wie man in einem heftigen Streite mit vielen Gegnern sich umsieht, ob nicht einer unter allen ist, der uns Beifall zulächelt, so suche ich zuweilen Dich; und wie man unter fremden Völkern freudig einem Landsmann entgegenfliegt, so werde ich Dir, mein liebes Ulrikchen entgegenkommen. (II, 495)

Time and again, particularly in his earlier years, he reiterates that she is the only one who understands him.[14]

But even his relationship with Ulrike does not fully satisfy Kleist's basic needs. Thus he writes to Karoline von Schlieben:

> Ach, liebe Freundin, Ulrike ist ein edles, weises, vortreffliches, grossmütiges Mädchen, und ich müsste von allem diesen nichts sein, wenn ich das nicht fühlen wollte. Aber--so viel sie auch besitzen, so viel sie auch geben kann, an ihrem Busen lässt sich doch nicht ruhen--Sie ist eine weibliche Heldenseele, die von ihrem Geschlechte nichts hat, als die Hüften. . . . (II, 664)

Nevertheless, Ulrike remains ready to help him out of his continually recurring difficulties, and he continues to feel the need for her love and support. From Switzerland he writes her: "Ich wollte, Du wärest bei mir geblieben.--Sind wir nicht wie Körper und Seele, die auch oft im Widerspruche stehen und doch ungern scheiden?" (II, 708). And in 1803, as he wanders about in France seeking to die "den schönen Tod der Schlachten," he once again expresses his desire for her friendship (II, 737). As late as 1810 he entreats her: "Könntest Du dich nicht entschliessen, auf ein oder ein paar Monate, nach Berlin zu kommen, und mir, als ein reines Geschenk, Deine Gegenwart zu gönnen?" (II, 832). And in a letter to Marie von Kleist written immediately prior to his death in November, 1811,

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[14]See, for example, Werke, II, pp. 582, 600, 625.

he complains that Ulrike "hat, dünkt mich, die Kunst nicht verstanden sich aufzuopfern, ganz für das, was man liebt, in Grund und Boden zu gehn. . . ," (II, 885) but in a final note to Ulrike herself he retracts this comment, acknowledging instead: "Du hast an mir getan, ich sage nicht, was in Kräften einer Schwester, sondern in Kräften eines Menschen stand, um mich zu retten. . ." (II, 887). Yet even her support and patient attempts to understand are inadequate, for as Kleist himself phrases it, "die Wahrheit ist, dass mir auf Erden nicht zu helfen war" (II, 887).

Kleist himself is aware of the root causes of the difficulties in his relationship to his family. The first is that with the exception of Ulrike, they do not understand him or his goals and ambitions. And this is not at all surprising, since from their point of view he led a highly irregular life, abandoning his honorable army career, rejecting work in the Prussian civil service, and fleeing from one uncertain and unsuccessful venture to the next. One would scarcely expect them to appreciate either the somewhat nebulous idealism issuing from his pre-Kantian "Religion," or his literary ambitions. But whether their attitudes toward the renegade Kleist are understandable or not, the fact remains that he suffers by virtue of his estrangement from the "liebste und teuerste Menschen auf der Welt" (II, 655).

There is yet another basic reason for the difficulty he experiences in attempting to establish communion with his family, in fact with other people in general. In a letter to Ulrike dated February 5, 1801, he laments the fact that even if the will to understand and be understood is there, there are insurmountable

barriers which effectively isolate the individual, which make it impossible that he communicate his true self. Thus Kleist feels that he cannot even totally reach Ulrike, the one member of his family who, he feels, totally understands him:

> Und gern möchte ich Dir alles mitteilen, wenn es möglich wäre. Aber es ist nicht möglich, und wenn es auch kein weiteres Hindernis gäbe, als dieses, dass es uns an einem Mittel zur Mitteilung fehlt. Selbst das einzige, das wir besitzen, die Sprache taugt nicht dazu, sie kann die Seele nicht malen, und was sie uns gibt sind nur zerrissene Bruchstücke. (II, 626)

And later in the same letter: "Ach es gibt kein Mittel, sich andern ganz verständlich zu machen, und der Mensch hat von Natur keinen andren Vertrauten, als sich selbst," (II, 627)--an existential Angstschrei.

Thus, although Kleist feels the need to be accepted, understood, and respected by his family, he remains throughout the bulk of his mature years unable to establish real communion with any of its members save Ulrike, and even his relationship to her is not without its problems. His failure to communicate meaningfully with his family is, however, but one aspect of a broader alienation from which he suffers.

Kleist and Wilhelmine von Zenge

After his discharge from military service in the spring of 1799 Kleist returns to Frankfurt to take up his studies at the local university. During this same year he becomes acquainted with eighteen year old Wilhelmine von Zenge, who with her parents lives in a home adjacent to the Kleist residence "am Nonnenwinkel." Kleist and Wilhelmine become engaged early in 1800, but due to a variety of circumstances, never do marry. Their engagement is

formally terminated in the spring of 1802 after Kleist persists in his determination to remain in Switzerland. In 1804 Wilhelmine marries Professor Wilhelm Traugott Krug, who in 1805 becomes Kant's successor at Königsberg.

It is not necessary at this point to explore the particulars in the relationship between Kleist and Wilhelmine, to analyze, for example, the pedagogical concern Kleist shows for his patient fiancée. Nevertheless, their relationship is revealing and important for the purposes of this study in that it provides additional evidence of Kleist's search for love and understanding, on the one hand, and his fear of "Einsamkeit" on the other hand. This phase of his experience reveals thus but another facet of the problem of alienation which looms so large in his life.

The period of Kleist's engagement to Wilhelmine could scarcely be termed stormy, but it is marked by uncertainty, anxiety, even torment. He feels a strong need for love, a need presumably to be filled as a result of his relationship to Wilhelmine. "Denn Liebe," he writes to her, "bedarf ich--und wo würde ich so viele Liebe wiederfinden?"(II, 553). He wants to know with absolute certainty whether or not she loves him (see II, 502, 552); it would give him "einen Augenblick voll der üppigsten und innigsten Freude, wenn Ihre Hand sich entschliessen könnte, diese drei Worte niederzuschreiben: ich liebe Dich" (II, 502). At times he feels certain of her love. "Endlich, endlich--ja Du lebst, und liebst mich noch" (II, 573) he writes in September of 1800, and in June, 1801: "Ich . . . weiss nun seit 5 Wochen nicht wie Du Dich befindest, wie Du lebst, was Du tust, nichts, als dass Du mich liebst" (II, 658). But at other times

an element of doubt as to the durability of their love seems to prevail, as when he comments that "wenn ich doch jemals mein Herz Dir entzöge, Dir selbst, nicht mir, würdest Du die Schuld zuzuschreiben haben" (II, 631). Instead of assuming that their relationship is to be permanent, he explores the possibility of its disruption, and goes into some detail in examining reasons for some such future fading of their love (see II, 610). Then too, he is not convinced that Wilhelmine's understanding of him is equal to that of his friend Brockes: "Von keinem andern kann ich dies letzte sagen, niemand versteht mich ganz, niemand kann mich ganz verstehen, als er und Du--ja selbst Du vielleicht, liebe Wilhelmine, wirst mich und meine künftigen Handlungen nie ganz verstehen, wenn Du nicht für das, was ich höher achte, als die Liebe, einen so hohen Sinn fassen kannst, als er" (II, 618).

Perhaps the most prominent single element in Kleist's letters to Wilhelmine is his incessant emphasis on "Vertrauen." Instead of regarding mutual trust as something to be taken for granted in their dealings with one another, he stresses its significance again and again. "Vertrauen," he reminds her, is "die erste Bedingung der Liebe" (II, 502); "Vertrauen" and Achtung" comprise "die Grundpfeiler der Liebe!' (II, 503). While grateful for the "Vertrauen" she has already demonstrated, (II, 501) he deems it necessary to remind her that she promised "unwandelbares Vertrauen in meine Liebe zu Dir" (II, 523). "Ich vertraue Dir ganz," (II, 520) he writes in August, 1800, and later in the same month: "Wenn ich mit ganzer Zuversicht auf Dein Vertrauen und Deine Ruhe rechnen kann, so lasse

ich jeden Schleier sinken, der nicht notwendig ist" (II, 525). While he maintains with emphasis that "mein Vertrauen zu Dir soll nicht wanken," (II, 564) he fears that Wilhelmine is to reward him "mit Misstrauen und Untreue" (II, 563). Alarmed by her apparent failure to write him regularly, he questions her in September, 1800:

> Gibt es denn keine Verbindung mehr zwischen uns, keine Wege, keine Brücken? Ist denn ein Abgrund zwischen uns eingesunken, dass sich die Länder nicht mehr ihre Arme, die Landstrassen, zureichen? Bist Du denn fortgeführt von dieser Erde, dass kein Gedanke mehr herüberkommt von Dir zu mir, wie aus einer andern Welt?--Oder ist doch irgend ein Unhold des Misstrauens zwischen uns getreten, mich loszureissen von Deinem Herzen? Und ist es ihm geglückt, wirklich geglückt? (II, 567)

If "Misstrauen" has developed, he admonishes her, "kehre um, liebes Mädchen. . . . Knüpfe Dich wieder an mich, tue es mit blinder Zuversicht. . . ." (II, 568). "Vertrauen auf uns, Einigkeit unter uns!" he exhorts her in April, 1801 (II, 644). He fears that his hasty departure from Berlin after the Kantkrise may have prompted "Misstrauen" on her part, (II, 667) and forgives her for this imagined transgression without her asking such forgiveness. And one could go on citing evidence of Kleist's obsession with "Vertrauen."

It is obvious from this repeated emphasis on "Vertrauen" that Kleist regards it as both indispensable and problematical. It is an absolute prerequisite to the establishment of genuine communion between the Ich and the Du, communion so difficult to achieve and sustain. Precisely because he is so fearful of being cut off from Wilhelmine, of being thrust into the loneliness he so dreads, does he find it necessary to stress "Vertrauen." He is unable to naively and unreflectively assume that communion is an obvious possibility. His insight instead is that in the natural

course of events, the person is isolated from his fellows. And if the natural barriers between persons are to be overcome, special effort must be expended, "Vertrauen" must be established and maintained.

Thus his relationship to Wilhelmine reveals his feeling of estrangement and his gnawing fear of alienation. Although he does not marry Wilhelmine, there can be no question as to his love for her and his distress at the termination of their engagement. He closes his final letter to her with the words: "Liebes Mädchen, schreibe mir nicht mehr. Ich habe keinen andern Wunsch als bald zu sterben" (II, 726). But he does not die; he proceeds instead to portray in his works the problems which have become so painfully potent in his own life.

Kleist in Society

In view of Kleist's feeling of estrangement from his family and the nature of his relationship to Wilhelmine von Zenge, it is not at all surprising that he does not easily fit into the society of his day, but tends instead to stand apart from it, particularly in his earlier years. Kleist himself advances several reasons for this state of affairs, reasons which merit some attention at this point.

One of the first observations he makes in this connection is that he does not share the interests, ideals, or aspirations of his fellows, and therefore is not understood by them. Thus he writes in November, 1799:

> Tausend Bande knüpfen die Menschen aneinander, gleiche Meinungen, gleiches Interesse, gleiche Wünsche, Hoffnungen und Aussichten;

> --alle diese Bande knüpfen mich nicht an sie, und dieses mag ein Hauptgrund sein, warum wir uns nicht verstehen. Mein Interesse besonders ist dem ihrigen so fremd, und ungleichartig, dass sie--gleichsam wie aus den Wolken fallen, wenn sie etwas davon ahnden. (II, 496)

"Ich wollte Dir nur zeigen," he continues in a later paragraph, "dass das Interesse, das mir die Seele erfüllt, schlecht mit dem Geiste harmoniert, der in dieser Gesellschaft weht. . ." (II, 497). And further on in the same letter he cites a specific example of just what he means:

> Aber wenn ich einen mathematischen Lehrsatz ergründet habe, dessen Erhabenheit und Grösse mir auch die Seele füllte, wenn ich nun mit diesem Eindruck in eine Gesellschaft trete, wem darf ich mich mitteilen, wer versteht mich? Nicht einmal ahnden darf ich lassen was mich zur Bewunderung hinriss, nicht einen von allen Gedanken darf ich mitteilen, die mir die Seele füllen. (II, 497)

A second problem felt by Kleist is the problem of communication. Language, he feels, is simply an ineffective vehicle of communication.

> Daher habe ich jedesmal eine Empfindung, wie ein Grauen, wenn ich jemandem mein Innerstes aufdecken soll; nicht eben weil es sich vor der Blösse scheut, aber weil ich ihm nicht <u>alles</u> zeigen <u>kann</u>, und daher fürchten muss, aus den Bruchstücken falsch verstanden zu werden. (II, 626)

And again: "Ach, es gibt kein Mittel, sich andern <u>ganz</u> verständlich zu machen. . ." (II, 627). As late as 1806 he points to the difficulties involved in verbal communication, and the ensuing lack of clarity. In a letter addressed to Karl von Stein zum Altenstein he writes: "Erlassen Sie mir, mich deutlicher darüber zu erklären. Stünd ich vor Ihren Augen, so würd ich Sprache finden, Ihnen deutlicher zu sein, Ihnen! Obschon ich es niemandem in der Welt bin--" (II, 763). It is, it seems to me, this feeling of frustration in his efforts to communicate himself which prompts him to write to Ulrike:

"Ich wollte ich könnte mir das Herz aus dem Leibe reissen, in diesen Brief packen, und Dir zuschicken. --Dummer Gedanke!" (II, 730).

A third difficulty causing Kleist to lament, "Ach, liebe Ulrike, ich passe nicht unter die Menschen. . ." (II, 628) involves the impossibility of maintaining candor and personal integrity "in Gesellschaften":

> Die Notwendigkeit, eine Rolle zu spielen, und ein innerer Widerwillen dagegen machen mir jede Gesellschaft lästig, und froh kann ich nur in meiner eignen Gesellschaft sein, weil ich da ganz wahr sein darf. Das darf man unter Menschen nicht sein, und keiner ist es. (II, 628)

Linked to this disagreeable and all-pervasive pretense is the uneasiness he feels as a result of his keen vision, his ability to pierce through such disguise, to perceive the truth, not only about others, but also about himself.

> Ach, es gibt eine traurige Klarheit, mit welcher die Natur viele Menschen, die an dem Dinge nur die Oberfläche sehen, zu ihrem Glücke verschont hat. Sie nennt mir zu jeder Miene den Gedanken, zu jedem Worte den Sinn, zu jeder Handlung den Grund--sie zeigt mir alles, was mich umgibt, und mich selbst in seiner ganzen armseligen Blösse, und dem Herzen ekelt zuletzt vor dieser Nacktheit. (II, 628)

A fourth problem felt by Kleist has to do with the painful embarrassment he feels in a social situation. "Es ergreift mich zuweilen plötzlich eine Ängstlichkeit, eine Beklommenheit, die ich zwar aus allen Kräften zu unterdrücken mich bestrebe, die mich aber dennoch schon mehr als einmal in die lächerlichsten Situationen gesetzt hat," (II, 496) he confesses to Ulrike in November, 1799. He makes a conscious effort to overcome this difficulty: "Die einzige Gesellschaft, die ich täglich sehe, ist Zengens, und ich würde um dieser peinlichen Verlegenheit willen, auch diese Gesellschaft schon aufgegeben haben, wenn ich mir nicht vorgenommen hätte,

mich durchaus von diesem unangenehmen Gefühl zu entwöhnen" (II, 496). But it continues to disturb him in the most agonizing way. Thus he laments to Ulrike:

> Dazu kommt bei mir eine unerklärliche Verlegenheit, die unüberwindlich ist, weil sie wahrscheinlich eine ganz physische Ursache hat. Mit der grössten Mühe nur kann ich sie so verstecken, dass sie nicht auffällt--o wie schmerzhaft ist es, in dem Äussern ganz stark und frei zu sein, indessen man im Innern ganz schwach ist, wie ein Kind, ganz gelähmt, als wären uns alle Glieder gebunden, wenn man sich nie zeigen kann, wie man wohl möchte, nie frei handeln kann, und selbst das Grosse versäumen muss, weil man vorausempfindet, dass man nicht standhalten wird, indem man von jedem äussern Eindrucke abhangt und das albernste Mädchen oder der elendeste Schuft von Elegant uns durch die matteste Persiflage vernichten kann. (II, 628)

Little wonder that, particularly in his earlier years, Kleist avoids situations in which he finds himself among larger groups of people.

He does not, however, live a life totally devoid of meaningful personal friendships. He feels, for example, very much attached to Ludwig von Brockes, the friend who accompanies him on his mysterious "Würzburger Reise" in 1800. Then there is the Wieland home, "wo ich mehr Liebe gefunden habe, als die ganze Welt zusammen aufbringen kann," (II, 730) and Rühle von Lilienstern, whose friendship he values very highly (see II, 760, 819). Of Adam Müller he writes: "Ich kann Ihnen nicht sagen, wie rührend mir die Freundschaft dieses Menschen ist, fast so rührend, wie seine Liebe zu seiner Frau" (II, 872). Friedrich de la Motte Fouque is another of his good friends, (see II, 860-862) and his affection for Marie von Kleist also is commonly known (see II, 877-79, 883-84).

But none of these friends permanently resides in Kleist's near proximity, and when they depart he is almost immediately cast once again into deep loneliness. And the poignancy of present

"Einsamkeit" seems to heavily outweigh the joys of past association. Thus when Brockes leaves, Kleist writes: "Er hat mich verlassen . . . und mit ihm habe ich den einzigen Menschen in dieser volkreichen Königsstadt verloren, der mein Freund war, den einzigen, den ich recht wahrhaft ehrte und liebte, den einzigen, für den ich in Berlin Herz und Gefühl haben konnte, den einzigen, dem ich es ganz geöffnet hatte und der jede, auch selbst seine geheimsten Falten kannte" (II, 618). The love he receives in the Wieland home he feels obliged to flee: "Aber ich musste fort! O Himmel, was ist das für eine Welt!" (II, 730).

It seems that Kleist's need for communion cannot be satisfied by an exchange of letters; if his friend is not physically present he cannot be content. Thus he writes to the departed Rühle: "Aber eine immer wiederkehrende Empfindung sagt mir, dass diese Brieffreundschaft für uns nicht ist. . ." (II, 760). And again: "Kurz, Müller, seitdem er weg ist, kömmt mir wie tot vor. . ." (II, 874). It is Kleist's experience that "das Leben, mit seinen zudringlichen, immer wiederkehrenden Ansprüchen, reisst zwei Gemüter schon in dem Augenblick der Berührung so vielfach aus einander, um wie viel mehr, wenn sie getrennt sind" (II, 873). And particularly just before the end of his life all of his friends seem to have left Berlin. Thus he writes to Marie von Kleist: "Müllers Abreise hat mich in grosse Einsamkeit versenkt" (II, 872). And again:

> Das Leben, das ich führe, ist seit Ihrer und A. Müllers Abreise gar zu öde und traurig. Auch bin ich mit den zwei oder drei Häusern, die ich hier besuchte, seit der letzten Zeit ein wenig ausser Verbindung gekommen, und fast täglich zu Hause, von Morgen bis auf den Abend, ohne auch nur einen Menschen zu sehen, der mir sagte, wie es in der Welt steht. (II, 873)

He seeks once more, but to no avail, to persuade Ulrike to move

to Berlin (II, 875). And in this time of deepest loneliness he meets Henriette Vogel, who consents to be his companion in death.

Thus it is the witness of Kleist's letters that although he feels an acute longing for communion, he finds it to be most difficult to attain and sustain. All of his life stands under the shadow of real or impending "Einsamkeit." In his younger years he is only too aware of the barriers between himself and others, barriers seemingly insurmountable. And the friends he does gain in later years gradually move away. It is from this final loneliness that he and Henriette embark on their "grosse Entdeckungsreise" (II, 886).

The Witness of Kleist's Dramas and Novellen

The insight contained in Kleist's letters, namely that the individual, while in need of communion, is constantly threatened with isolation, is also repeatedly given expression in his creative works. The figures he creates tend to stand alone, to be prominent by virtue of their "Vereinzelung," to use Müller-Seidel's term.[15] It is often their experience that the forces separating them from organic union with their Umwelt appear by nature to be more powerful than their own efforts toward reunion, toward communion. And yet, as was the case with Kleist himself, his figures need to belong, to be part of a larger unity.

This is, of course, no unique critical insight. Friedrich Gundolf, as was noted above, claims to detect evidences of "diese angeborene Abgesondertheit des Kleistschen Genies" not only in the

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[15]Walter Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen: Eine Studie über Heinrich von Kleist (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1961), 35.

poet's own behavior, but also in his literary characters.[16] And later critics in particular have stressed the isolation in which Kleist's figures stand, the rupture which takes place in the lines of communication between the Ich and the Du. Thus Ernst von Reusner emphasizes time and again "dass Kleists Gestalten sind, insofern sie bezogen sind: sie existieren in Beziehungen. Die Beziehungen sind gestört, und zwar derart, dass die Gestalten, obwohl sie aufeinander bezogen sind, bloss sie selber fühlen. Die Störung betrifft die innerste Existenz."[17] And Müller-Seidel writes: "Die Personen im Drama aber auch in der Novelle Kleists sind eigentümlich herausgelöst und der Vereinzelung preisgegeben. . . ."[18]

This problem of "Einsamkeit," of the threat of isolation confronting Kleist's characters, has already been discussed in earlier pages of this dissertation. It has been noted that in the case of Schroffenstein, Der zerbrochene Krug and Die Verlobung in St. Domingo, man's only escape from ultimate loneliness is via "Vertrauen," the establishment of an immediate bond between persons, one which exists totally independently of external circumstance. Of these three works only Der zerbrochene Krug has a conciliatory ending, but both Schroffenstein and the Verlobung also point the way. In a world which tends to reinforce loneliness, to erect barriers between persons, the only successful stance can be that of adherence to "Gefühl" in interpersonal relationships, i.e., "Vertrauen." Thus it becomes immediately obvious that as far as these three works

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[16]Gundolf, 42. [17]von Reusner, 65.

[18]Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen, 35.

are concerned, at least, the testimony of Kleist's letters corresponds to that of his creative literary works.

But these are not the only works which portray the threat of isolation, of "Einsamkeit," which Kleist so keenly experiences in his own life. Take for example the case of Penthesilea. Her actions and attitudes give concrete evidence of her withdrawal from the Amazon state, the politico-religious matrix which has borne and nurtured her all throughout her life. This uprooting is totally necessary if she is to live in fidelity to "Gefühl," but it also results in an unbearable isolation. In an effort to overcome this isolation she fights for the love of Achilles, and in the dread awareness of her violated "Gefühl" she goes out--alone--to kill him, and finally to follow him--alone--in death. There is, it appears, the possibility of a new communion to replace the one she has rejected, but this possibility fails to materialize, for the lines of communication fail in a most critical hour. Ultimately the only release from total isolation is to follow "diesem Jüngling hier," to follow him in death.

Alkmene too is threatened with total, devastating loneliness. The religious problem with which she struggles, namely whether or not there is for her a source of existential religious certainty, is immediately related to the problem of "Vereinzelung," for the maintenance of her bond with Amphitryon is directly dependent upon firm assurance as to her own existential purity, her own fidelity. If she cannot be sure of her own integrity, it is impossible for her to maintain her union with Amphitryon, and she becomes totally exposed, totally alone. Thus her bitter lament in Act III:

> Auf der Gebirge Gipfel will ich fliehen,
> In tote Wildnis hin, wo auch die Eule

Mich nicht besucht, wenn mir kein Wächter ist,
Der in Unsträflichkeit den Busen mir bewahrt.--
(I, 317, ll. 2257-60)

Amphitryon cannot and does not understand her awful struggle. She is forced to endure it alone. And only at the drama's end, when the veil is lifted by Jupiter himself, is the threat of Alkmene's total isolation overcome, is the possibility of restored communion re-created.

The Marquise von O . . . is another and particularly striking example of a Kleistian figure cut totally free, at least temporarily, from all those whose understanding she so desperately needs. Her family simply cannot maintain "Vertrauen" in the face of evidence which contradicts her pleading assertions of innocence; instead it rejects her totally and the Marquise is cast back solely upon her own resources. She is forced to face an incomprehensible world by herself, and does, in fact, overcome through the power of the religiously grounded Ich. Although her isolation is perhaps not as total as that of Alkmene, for she does retain her children, her brutal rejection by her parents cuts her to the quick. And ultimately, the broader community which she also needs is restored; her isolation and withdrawal are supplanted by a restoration of broken bonds and the establishment of even more intimate new ones.

In Das Erdbeben in Chili there is portrayed another instance of alienation. Jeronimo and Josephe do establish communication with each other, but in the process become cut off from society at large. True, the awesome earthquake serves to momentarily unite the children of men into one family and to provide a place within it even for Jeronimo and Josephe, but this identification of neighbor with neighbor is only temporary; all too soon the young couple learns

that it has not in fact been accepted into the broader community, but remains thrust out of it, the target of its basest impulses. Those same people who but yesterday performed and witnessed heroic self-sacrifice at every turn are today responsible for the most brutal murder. The united family of men so briefly realized falls prey once again to fragmentation, to hostility. The only community ultimately prevailing is the community of devilishness. And Jeronimo and Josephe become its victims.

Michael Kohlhaas too is basically a lonely person, one who stands apart from his fellows. True, men eagerly flock to his side, but not because they share his vision. Their basic motivation is merely the desire for booty. No one really understands Kohlhaas, neither his wife, nor Luther, nor anyone else. Although his lonely fight is not merely for himself, but is also fought on behalf of his fellow citizens, they do not and cannot appreciate his basic concern. His cause is beyond their understanding, and thus his desperate fight for the right to be is conducted in an aura of grand and heroic loneliness.

In the Prinz von Homburg the situation is a bit different. The prince appears to assume at the beginning of the play that he is a part of the larger community, but when faced with the ultimate crisis, he rejects his fellows and their rights, clinging only to his own physical existence. He ultimately, in discovering his true self, finds the way to real Gemeinschaft, identifying with the larger community, its interests and its rights. But the path the prince must take is a perilous one, and the way from isolation to true communion is not an easy way. It involves instead inner strife

and a total transformation. Gemeinschaft is indeed precious, as Kleist himself knows, and it does not develop automatically. It is something for which one may be constrained to struggle, but there is at the same time no question about it; it is well worth the struggle. It is, in fact, indispensible if life is to be realized in all of its richness.

In conclusion then, whereas the Christian traditionally is aware of his organic membership in the "body of Christ," his belonging in the community of God and fellow man, Kleist's first awareness is of his "Einsamkeit," of the natural gulf between himself and other persons. It is this same tendency toward loneliness, toward isolation, which is reflected in so many of the characters in his creative works, figures who either temporarily or permanently stand so prominently alone.

It is the testimony both of Kleist's letters and his dramas and Novellen that this loneliness can be broken if "Vertrauen" can be established and maintained. Agnes and Ottokar in Schroffenstein, and Jeronimo and Josephe in Das Erdbeben in Chili do find the way from the Ich to the Du. But it is a perilous way, as Kleist himself knows, and the bridge between persons is subject to abrupt collapse--provided it can be established at all. Gustav von der Ried shoots Toni in cold blood, Ruprecht denies Eve when she needs him most, the Marquise von O . . .'s family abandons her when she so desperately needs its support, and Penthesilea joins the beasts in literally devouring the one on whom she has staked all of her existence, and who seemingly has failed her.

Nor can it automatically be assumed that the individual has a meaningful place in the state. Kohlhaas stands out as a lonely man expelled from the state intended to protect him. His fight for personal existence is at the same time a fight for his position in the state. Homburg too stands outside of the state until his reorientation occurs. The fact that he does eventually assume his place in society and affirm its claims is encouraging. But both Kohlhaas and Homburg gain the position they ultimately attain only after enormous struggle. Just as individual persons are not naturally in union with each other, so they also are not naturally in organic union with social or political institutions. They tend instead to stand apart.

Kleist and the Church

As was noted earlier, Kleist does not appear to regard the institutional church and affiliation with it to be in any way vital to his own personal existence. Though he was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran communion, both his early, pre-Kantian "Religion" and the "Religion des Gefühls" later affirmed in his dramas and Novellen are marked by perspectives quite alien to those of traditional orthodox Christianity and its institutions.

This does not mean, however, that Kleist took absolutely no note of the Church. In the process of his intellectual and religious development he reacts at some length to the Catholic church in particular, to its religious usages and to the attitudes of its adherents. The remaining pages of this chapter will be in large part devoted to an examination of his attitudes toward the Church, and

in particular the Roman Catholic Church, as they are recorded in his letters and creative works.

Kleist's Würzburg Experience

In August of 1800 Kleist and his friend Ludwig von Brockes left Berlin and embarked on their mysterious "Würzburger Reise." It is in Würzburg that Kleist apparently has his initial extended contact with the institutional Catholic Church and a predominately Catholic culture. And his reaction to what he observes is almost exclusively negative in tone:

> Die ganze Stadt wimmelt von Heiligen, Aposteln und Engeln, und wenn man durch die Strassen geht, so glaubt man, man wandle durch den Himmel der Christen. Aber die Täuschung dauert nicht lang. Denn Heere von Pfaffen und Mönchen, buntscheckig montiert, wie die Reichstruppen, laufen uns unaufhörlich entgegen und erinnern uns an die gemeinste Erde." (II, 554)

His depiction of the city's prayer for protection against the French army is obviously sarcastic: "Messen und Hora wechseln immer miteinander ab, und die Perlen der Rosenkränze sind in ewiger Bewegung. Denn es gilt die Rettung der Stadt, und da die Franzosen für ihren Untergang beten, so kommt es darauf an, wer am meisten betet" (II, 555). He mocks the indulgences so readily available to the devout, (II, 555) and is sharply critical of the Catholic "Gottesdienst":

> Bei uns erweckt doch die Rede des Priesters, oder ein Gellertsches Lied manchen herzerhebenden Gedanken; aber das ist hier bei dem Murmeln des Pfaffen, das niemand hört, weil es lateinisch ist, nicht möglich. Ich bin überzeugt, dass alle diese Präparate nicht einen einzigen vernünftigen Gedanken erwecken. (II, 555)

He objects to what he sees as the Catholic preoccupation with the after-life which, he is convinced, results in inactivity and a failure to capitalize on current challenges (II, 556). The Catholic

Church, as Kleist views it in Würzburg, does not shed light, but instead effectively blocks it out (II, 571). And the inferior intellectual tone of the city is reflected in the holdings of its library, whose shelves house nothing but "Rittergeschichten, lauter Rittergeschichten" (II, 563).

Kleist scholars have analyzed the above criticism in various ways. Wilhelm Herzog, for example, attributes a large measure of this early harshness Kleist shows toward Catholicism to his Protestant religious orientation, noting that he mocks "den katholischen Gottesdienst in protestantischem Eifer."[19] Karl Federn's comments reflect a similar emphasis: "Er schildert den Eindruck der katholischen Stadt, der vielen Kirchen und Klöster, die Unwissenheit der Bewohner, lehnt als Protestant der Aufklärungszeit den katholischen Gottesdienst und was er sonst Katholisches auf der Reise fand, bestimmt ab."[20] Other critics view Kleist's objections to Würzburg Catholicism as revealing first of all the strong impact of Aufklärung thought on his attitudes. Thus Walter Silz writes that "he scoffs like a true apostle of Enlightenment. . ."[21] and further comments:

> On his trip to Würzburg in 1800 Kleist comes for the first time into contact with the Roman Catholic religion, and . . . regards it, as might be expected, from a coldly rationalistic point of view. He seems to object to its ritual on the ground that it appeals to the mind rather than to the heart, but if we read

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[19]Wilhelm Herzog, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), 133.

[20]Federn, 46.

[21]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist's Conception of the Tragic (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), 8.

> the passage at all scrupulously, we find that his objections themselves are of a purely rationalistic stamp. . . .[22]

Heinz Ide, however, cautions directly against what he feels to be such overemphasis on rationalistic strains in Kleist's thought, noting, for example, that the word "vernünftig" as he uses it has distinctly non-rationalistic overtones:

> Ein vernünftiges Denken[23] ist für Kleist ein geistiges Erfassen aus der personalen Substanz. Kleist will und kann sich nicht einer unbekannten transzendenten Macht fraglos vertrauend hingeben, er muss im Herzen (im Gefühl) wissen und muss aus diesem nicht rationalen Wissen heraus den rationalen Verstand kommandieren können.[24]

An examination of Kleist's own statements suggests that there is a measure of truth in each of these emphases. Although his objections to Würzburg Catholicism are not at heart doctrinal objections, he obviously considers the Protestant "Gottesdienst," for example, to be superior to the Catholic service, and even appears to a degree to identify himself as a Protestant.[25] Ide's insight also is valid; namely, that it is unwarranted to simply label Kleist a rationalistic Aufklärer interested only in logical analysis and the testimony of empirical evidence.[26] Critics like Walter Silz

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[22]Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 8.

[23]Ide here has reference to the word "vernünftig" as used by Kleist in the following quotation, also given above: "Ich bin überzeugt, dass alle diese Präparate [re: the Catholic "Gottesdienst"] nicht einen einzigen vernünftigen Gedanken erwecken" (II, 556).

[24]Ide, 228.

[25]Thus he writes to Wilhelmine: "Bei uns erweckt doch die Rede des Priesters, oder ein Gellertsches Lied manchen herzerhebenden Gedanken. . ." (II, 555).

[26]Kleist himself states in connection with his objections to the Catholic "Gottesdienst": "Alle Zeremonien ersticken das Gefühl. Sie beschäftigen unsern Verstand, aber das Herz bleibt tot" (II, 556).

undeniably do overemphasize Enlightenment strains in his thought. Nevertheless, it is at the same time unquestionably true that these early objections to Catholicism do reveal an orientation pronouncedly influenced by the thought of the late 18th-century German Aufklärung.

Kleist's letters from Würzburg indicate, for example, that in accordance with the thought of the Enlightenment, he is unwilling to accept any revealed religion and its practices as absolute. "Ich will dich . . . nur aufmerksam machen," he writes to Wilhelmine from Würzburg, "dass alle diese religiösen Gebräuche nichts sind, als menschliche Vorschriften, die zu allen Zeiten verschieden waren und noch in diesem Augenblicke an allen Orten der Erde verschieden sind" (II, 317). And it is immediately obvious here that it is by no means Kleist's intention to advocate some such thing as a return to the basic essentials of a Christianity stripped of its historical trappings. Rather, he rejects the ultimate validity of any positive religion, insisting instead that the essence of all religion is "erfülle Deine Pflicht . . . eine Vorschrift . . . die muss göttlich sein, weil sie ewig und allgemein ist" (II, 317). In other words, Kleist rejects acceptance on faith of the Biblical witness in favor of the authority of "ethische Vernunft," which dictates only the universal imperative "erfülle Deine Pflicht." "Dass ein Gott sei, dass es ein ewiges Leben, einen Lohn für die Tugend, eine Strafe für die Laster gebe," he continues, "das alles sind Sätze, die in jenem nicht gegründet sind, und die wir also entbehren können" (II, 317). In adopting this Enlightenment perspective, which is critical of all revealed religions and their rites, Catholicism included, he obviously reflects the temper of his age.

This insistence upon the relativity of all positive religions is a result not only of the critical intellectual bent of the Aufklärung, but also mirrors its ethical interest,[27] an interest clearly shared by Kleist. "Denn nur gar zu leicht glaubt man, man habe alles getan, wenn man die ernsten Gebräuche der Religion beobachtet, wenn man fleissig in die Kirche geht, täglich betet, und jährlich zweimal das Abendmahl nimmt" (II, 316). The important thing is that one do his duty (II, 317). His sarcasm in commenting on indulgences reflects the same ethical concern, the fear that dependence upon such aids will result in ethical indolence. Thus his comment on the prayer found "vor einem wundertätigen Marienbilde," which if read "mit Andacht" results in the granting of an indulgence of two hundred days: "Gelesen habe ich es; doch da es nicht mit der gehörigen Andacht geschah, so werde ich mich doch wohl vor Sünden hüten, und nach wie vor tun müssen, was recht ist" (II, 555).

The same ethical concern is mirrored in Kleist's admonition to Wilhelmine that she dedicate all of her energies to a responsible fulfillment of her "Bestimmung auf dieser Erde" (II,565). For in Catholic Würzburg he has observed that concentration on the next life results in culpable neglect of the present. He feels compelled to warn her against such "religiöse Grübeleien," in his own words, "weil ich eben grade in einer Stadt lebe, wo man über die Andacht die Tätigkeit ganz vergisst" (II, 566). One final evidence of the ethical interest motivating Kleist is his negative reaction to Catholic intolerance. As was noted earlier in this dissertation,

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[27]Comment on the ethical concern of the Aufklärung is found in Chapter II, pp. 53-54, 59 of this dissertation.

one reason for the negative attitude of the Aufklärung toward positive religions was the belief that adherence to them readily results in intolerance.[28] And in Würzburg Kleist perceives concrete evidence of such intolerance. "In kurzem," he reports, "wird hier eine Prozession sein, zur Niederschlagung der Feinde, und, wie es heisst, 'zur Ausrottung aller Ketzer.' Also auch zu Deiner und meiner Ausrottung" (II, 556).[29]

Kleist also objects to the dull intellectual tone and the general lack of cultural vitality which he notes in Würzburg. The pitiable holdings of the local library comprise only one evidence of this sad state of affairs. And Kleist clearly associates this intellectual and cultural torpor with the influence of Catholicism:

> Man ist aber hier so still und fromm, wie auf einem Kirchhofe. Nirgends findet man ein Auge, das auf eine interessante Frage eine interessante Antwort verspräche. Auch hier erinnert das Läuten der Glocken unaufhörlich an die katholische Religion, wie das Geklirr der Ketten den Gefangnen an seine Sklaverei. (II, 563)

And in a later letter he comments:

> Ebenso haben die Häuser einen Überfluss von Fenstern, ja, man könnte sagen, die ganze Fassade sei nichts als ein grosses Fenster, und da könnte denn freilich genug Tageslicht einfallen; aber dicht davor steht eine hohe Kirche oder ein Kloster, und es bleibt ewig Nacht. Grade ohngefähr wie bei den Besitzern. (II, 571)

Here too Kleist shows himself to be a man of his era, an era which places a high premium on the free exercise of the intellect.

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[28] See Chapter II, p. 59 of this dissertation.

[29] Kleist finds in Würzburg one exception to the general intolerance prevailing in the city, but emphasizes that it is the only exception. "Dabei ist es besonders bemerkenswürdig und lobenswert, dass die religiöse Toleranz, die nirgends in diesem ganzen Hochstift anzutreffen ist, grade hier in diesem Spital, wo sie so nötig war, Platz gefunden hat. . ." (II, 559).

A final objection Kleist has to the Catholicism he encounters in Würzburg is less directly related to Enlightenment thought. In regard to the Catholic "Gottesdienst" he presumably has witnessed he observes: "Überhaupt, dünkt mich, alle Zeremonien ersticken das Gefühl. Sie beschäftigen unsern Verstand, aber das Herz bleibt tot" (II, 556). He earlier makes a similar comment about the "Nickolskirche zu Leipzig" which he visited while enroute to Würzburg, stating: "Aber das weiss ich, dass die edeln Gestalten der leblosen Steine wärmer zu meinem Herzen sprachen, als der hochgelehrte Priester auf seiner Kanzel" (II, 552). It is obvious that Silz overstates his case in asserting among other things that Kleist regards "the Roman Catholic Religion . . . from a coldly rationalistic point of view."[30] One of his formost objections to it is that its worship service leaves the heart unaffected--scarcely the objection of a cold rationalist.[31]

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[30]Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 8.

[31]Silz' argument runs in part as follows: "He seems to object to its ritual on the ground that it appeals to the mind rather than to the heart, but if we read the passage at all scrupulously, we find that his objections themselves are of a purely rationalistic stamp, as are the very words he uses("sinnend," "begreifen," "Gedanken," "verstehen," "vernünftigen Gedanken.")" (Silz, Kleist's Conception of the Tragic, 8.) But Silz' argument at this point is less than convincing. Neither "sinnend" nor "begreifen" as used in the context of Kleist's comments refers to a purely "rationalistic" enterprise. The word "Gedanken" to which Silz refers likewise is preceded in one instance by the adjective "herzerhebend," which has strong emotional overtones, and in the other instance by the adjective "vernünftig," which as Ide shows, is not here meant in a rationalistic sense. The word "verstehen," which also supposedly smacks of "cold rationalism" is used only in regard to the use of a foreign language, and its presence has no bearing on the argument at hand.

In summary, then, Kleist's objection to Würzburg Catholicism is not essentially a doctrinal or theological objection. He is not interested, for example, in demonstrating the doctrinal superiority of any other Christian denomination over Catholicism. In the tradition of the later Aufklärung he rejects instead all revealed religions, and thus also Catholicism, because he is unwilling to view it from the perspective of faith. He approaches it critically and analytically and for reasons which in large measure reflect the spirit of his times rejects it. He fears that its practices will lead to ethical indifference, to a concentration on the future life at the expense of the present, and to intolerance. He also appears to be convinced that in Würzburg, at least, there is a causal relationship between the religion of its inhabitants and the depressing lack of intellectual and cultural vitality they exhibit.

Kleist's Experience in Dresden

Kleist's next extended comment on Catholicism is contained in a letter dated May 21, 1801. Although only eight months have gone by since his Würzburg experience, it is obvious from this letter that a decisive change has taken place in his outlook. He has just undergone his Kantkrise, and in the process has seen the final destruction of his earlier religious orientation. Rootless and goal-less, he is, in his own words, "in dem Heiligtum meiner Seele erschüttert" (II, 636). He repeats time and again: "Mein einziges und höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, ich habe keines mehr" (II, 636). Unable to drift aimlessly from one day to the next, he seeks "ein neues Ziel, dem mein Geist, froh-beschäftigt, von neuem entgegenschreiten

könnte. Aber ich finde es nicht," he laments, "und eine innerliche Unruhe treibt mich umher. . ."(II, 636). It is in this mood of restless and intense anxiety that he decides to travel, hopeful thereby of rediscovering purpose. "Ich will mir einen Zweck suchen, wenn es einen gibt. Wenn ich zu Hause bliebe," he explains to Ulrike, "so müsste ich die Hände in den Schoss legen und denken; so will ich lieber spazieren gehen, und denken. Ich kehre um, sobald ich weiss, was ich tun soll" (II, 636).

The ultimate destination of his journey, which he undertakes in company with Ulrike, is Paris, but enroute he spends a good deal of time in Dresden. He is deeply impressed by the world of art which opens itself to him in this city.

> Ich zweifle, dass ich auf meiner ganzen bevorstehenden Reise, selbst Paris nicht ausgenommen, eine Stadt finden werde, in welcher die Zerstreuung so leicht und angenehm ist, als Dresden. Nichts war so fähig mich so ganz ohne alle Erinnerung wegzuführen von dem traurigen Felde der Wissenschaft, als diese in dieser Stadt gehäuften Werke der Kunst. Die Bildergalerie, die Gipsabgüsse, das Antikenkabinett, die Kupferstichsammlung, die Kirchenmusik in der katholischen Kirche, das alles waren Gegenstände bei deren Genuss man den Verstand nicht braucht, die nur allein auf Sinn und Herz wirken. Mir war so wohl bei diesem ersten Eintritt in diese für mich ganz neue Welt voll Schönheit. (II, 650)

Raphael's "Madonna" he finds to be particularly impressive, and stands "stundenlang" in contemplation before it (II,650). Here in Dresden he finds evidence of a religious certainty which he himself so desperately seeks and needs. Kleist envies the young artists he observes, for they are bothered by "kein Zweifel um das Wahre, das sich nirgends findet" (II, 651). But he is even more profoundly moved by his experience of the Catholic worship service.

> Nirgends fand ich mich aber tiefer in meinem Innersten gerührt, als in der katholischen Kirche, wo die grösste, erhebenste Musik noch zu den andern Künsten tritt, das Herz

> gewaltsam zu bewegen. Ach, Wilhelmine, unser Gottesdienst ist keiner. Er spricht nur zu dem kalten Verstande, aber zu allen Sinnen ein katholisches Fest. Mitten vor dem Altar, an seinen untersten Stufen, kniete jedesmal, ganz isoliert von den andern, ein gemeiner Mensch, das Haupt auf die höheren Stufen gebückt, betend mit Inbrunst. Ihn quälte kein Zweifel, er glaubt--Ich hatte eine unbeschreibliche Sehnsucht mich neben ihn niederzuwerfen, und zu weinen--Ach, nur einen Tropfen Vergessenheit, und mit Wollust würde ich katholisch werden--. Doch davon wollte ich ja eben schweigen. (II, 651)

What accounts for this drastic change of attitude toward Catholicism? Gundolf rather impatiently attributes this change to what he views as Kleist's emotional and intellectual instability.[32] Other critics point to his newly-won appreciation of the arts, emphasizing with Joachim Maass that his experience in the Dresden cathedral is "wesentlich doch ästhetisch."[33] Thus Ernst Kayka sees his appreciation of the Catholic service mainly as a reflection of his love for music,[34] and Arthur Eloesser stresses the seductive effect of "den sinnlichen Reizen des katholischen Kultus" on Kleist.[35] Other critics, such as Servaes,[36] claim to detect the influence of Romantic thought in Kleist's positive attitude toward Catholicism. Still others, notably Hanna Hellmann and Heinz Ide, view his reaction to the Dresden worship service as an expression of his longing for paradise lost, for the lost religious serenity and certainty of

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[32]See Gundolf, p. 20.

[33]Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens (Wien: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1957), 334.

[34]See Ernst Kayka, Kleist und die Romantik (Berlin: A. Duncker, 1906), 130.

[35]See Arthur Eloesser, Heinrich von Kleist, eine Studie ("Die Literatur," Vol. XVI; Berlin: Bard Marquardt et Co., 1904),23.

[36]See Franz Servaes, Heinrich von Kleist (Leipzig: Verlag von E. A. Seemann und der Gesellschaft für graphische Industrie, 1902), 28.

his youth. "Idyllische Liebe soll die Zwiespältigkeit heilen, naive Religion der Seele das verlorene Zentrum geben. . ."[37] writes Hanna Hellmann. And Ide makes similar comments.[38]

As to the validity of the above analyses, Gundolf's attitude betrays at best a shallow appreciation of the earnestness of Kleist's religious concern and the significance of his Kantkrise. To anyone who reads Kleist's letters carefully it is immediately obvious that his change of attitude toward Catholicism is not simply the expression of a flighty temperament or a superficial intellect. Between Würzburg and Dresden lies the culmination of nothing less than a drastic religious uprooting. This insight has escaped Gundolf.

It also is highly doubtful that Kleist's reaction to Dresden Catholicism is significantly affected by Romantic religious currents. His basic orientation, as Fricke and Ide point out at great length, is radically different from that of the German Romanticists. Furthermore, there is no other solid evidence that the younger Kleist looked to the Romantics for intellectual or religious guidance. And the essential elements of his Dresden religious experience can be accounted for without resorting to an appeal to current Romantic thought.

There can be no question, however, as to the importance of the esthetic element in his affirmative reaction to the Catholic "Gottesdienst." Kleist himself is explicit in this respect. It is in the Catholic church that "die grösste, erhebenste Musik noch zu den andern Künsten tritt, das Herz gewaltsam zu bewegen" (II, 651). "Ein katholisches Fest," in his own words, speaks "zu allen

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[37]Hanna Hellmann, Heinrich von Kleist, Das Problem seines Lebens und seiner Dichtung (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1908), 11.

[38]See Ide, 285.

Sinnen" (II, 651). "Die Kirchenmusik in der katholischen Kirche" (II, 650) obviously makes a deep impression on Kleist, and constitutes one of the prominent elements "in dieser für mich ganz neuen Welt voll Schönheit" (II, 650).

To imply, however, that Kleist's Dresden Catholic experience is "wesentlich doch ästhetisch" is simply not warranted, in my opinion. His basic concern is with ultimate truth, with faith, and with doubt. As was noted above, in the lines immediately preceding his comments on the Catholic "Gottesdienst" he tells of his envy of the young artists he observes, because they are burdened by "kein Zweifel um das Wahre" (II, 651). And he feels "eine unbeschreibliche Sehnsucht" to join the "gemeiner Mensch" fervently praying before the altar, for "ihn quälte kein Zweifel, er glaubt" (II, 651). Kleist has lost his former religious goals; he lacks motivation and purpose. His search is for sense and meaning in life, and for a brief moment he feels drawn to accept Catholicism as furnishing a new center of meaning. For a moment he considers taking the way of traditional religious faith in his search for "einen neuen Zweck."

Thus the analyses of Ide and Hellmann are perhaps closest to the truth. Kleist is attracted to Catholicism because he sees it as furnishing what Hellmann terms "das verlorene Zentrum."[39] Ide suggests something similar: "Es zeigt sich, dass auch Kleists Reflexionen über den Katholizismus nichts anderes sind als ein Ausdruck seiner Sehnsucht nach dem verlorenen Glück, das er als

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[39]Hellmann, Das Problem seines Lebens und seiner Dichtung, 11.

Knabe getrâumt hatte."[40] But this "Glück" is no mere superficial happiness; it is the result of a conviction that there is knowable meaning and purpose in life.

In short, Kleist' change of attitude toward Catholicism may be described as follows. In Würzburg he could well afford to be critical of revealed religion and its usages, since he felt that he had insight into a superior religious orientation. With Kant, however, he is deprived of all this, and in his "Angst" feels only an aching void. That is, in Dresden he is aware of a religious need which he did not perceive in Würzburg, and thus is of necessity more open to the attractions of Catholicism. Because the need he feels is so pressing, Kleist temporarily puts aside the intellectual and ethical objections he previously voiced in Würzburg. And the attractiveness of Catholicism as providing a center of meaning is complemented by the esthetic appeal of its "Gottesdienst," an appeal to which he has but recently become sensitive.

In other words, Kleist's fervent, though momentary, desire to embrace Catholicism is not based on the conviction of its doctrinal superiority nor merely on esthetic considerations. It is instead the result of a keenly felt religious need, the prospect of peace and "einen neuen Zweck" within the bosom of the Church, whose attractiveness is enhanced by the esthetic appeal of its ritual.

Nevertheless, Kleist does not become Catholic; the necessary "Tropfen Vergessenheit" is not forthcoming. Just what does prevent him from entering the church at this point? Friedrich Braig suggests that he does not embrace Catholicism simply because he is unable to

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[40]Ide, 285.

believe and unable or unwilling to humble himself.[41] Rudolf Ibel claims that Kleist's existential perspective makes the acceptance of Christianity an impossibility, for to affirm its teachings means to evade, according to Ibel, one's existential confrontation with "Schicksal."[42] And finally there is Walter Silz, who makes yet another suggestion: "Had it not been for his strong loyalty to family tradition, we may believe that Kleist would, like Friedrich Schlegel, have taken refuge in the bosom of the ancient church."[43]

As for Braig's suggestion, it is at best not particularly helpful. To state that Kleist is unable to believe is only to affirm the obvious. Furthermore, to assert that he is unwilling to humble himself ("sich beugen") is to say nothing unique about Kleist, since men throughout the ages have rejected the claims of Christianity presumably for the same reason.

Silz' comment, on the other hand, that family tradition apparently makes it impossible for him to abandon the Prussian-Protestant mainstream, is no more helpful, and is itself highly dubious. It would indeed seem odd if the same Kleist who stubbornly breaks with the exceedingly strong family military tradition in favor of pursuing his own unique ideals should shrink back from Catholicism because of the fear of violating what Silz terms "family tradition." No such relatively superficial consideration, it

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[41]Friedrich Braig, Heinrich von Kleist (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925), 82.

[42]Ibel, 55.

[43]Walter Silz, Early German Romanticism--Its Founders and Heinrich von Kleist (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1929), 146.

seems to me, restrains him from "taking refuge," to use Silz' terms, "in the bosom of the ancient church."

Ibel's statement, on the other hand, merits more serious consideration. The more mature Kleist, I am convinced, does approach life from an existential perspective, an unarticulated perspective which may well underlie and give rise to his religious struggle during the years 1800 and thereafter. But it is at the same time true that the "Vergessenheit" which Kleist cannot muster centers more immediately around such objections to Catholicism as he had voiced in Würzburg. The fact that he now is open to the esthetic appeal of Catholicism whereas it previously had not touched him does not cancel out his earlier conviction that "alle diese religiösen Gebräuche nichts sind, als menschliche Vorschriften," (II, 317) that the practices of Catholicism tend to exercise an ethically deleterious effect, and that Catholicism tends to discourage intellectual vitality. And of these three objections the first, it seems to me, is the most crucial. Kleist simply cannot forget that Catholicism is but one of many religions, that it has no more claim to ultimate validity than does any other religion, and that consequently to affirm its teachings would be not only futile; it would also involve committing an act of gross intellectual dishonesty. He is, among other things, too deeply steeped in the religious thought and tradition of the Enlightenment to be able to lay aside his doubts, and like the common man before the altar, simply to believe. Prior to Dresden he has become convinced that the claims of any positive religion are basically invalid, and now he is forced to live with that conviction.

The Testimony of Kleist's Works

Since the institutional church has for centuries been a prominent force in western culture, it is not at all remarkable that it also appears as a significant element in certain of Kleist's creative works. Its presence is felt particularly in Das Erdbeben in Chili (1807), Die heilige Cäcilie (1810), and Der Findling (1811 ??), while it plays a less important role in such works as Die Marquise von O . . ., Der Zweikampf, and Michael Kohlhaas.[44] In most of these Novellen it is specifically the Catholic Church whose workings are depicted.

The institutional church is not always shown in an equally favorable light in Kleist's Novellen. In Die heilige Cäcilie, for example, the abbess of the convent of St. Cäcilie is portrayed as a noble and humane person who treats the mother of the four iconoclasts, a Protestant, with gentleness and respect. The nuns under her jurisdiction are in turn deeply devout women in whom genuine piety is allied with a remarkable musical sensitivity. And both they and the cathedral in which the Mass is being celebrated are miraculously spared the devastation which "die vier gotteslästerlichen Brüder" intended to wreak upon them. There can be no question about it, the potential villains in this narrative are the insensitive and blasphemous young "Bilderstürmer" who would disrupt the Mass and deface the sanctuary intended only for worship. The fact that their designs are foiled is concrete evidence of the favor of Providence

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[44]Kohlhaas' conflict, as it centers in his interview with Luther, is not first of all a conflict with the institutional church, but rather with the basic teachings and presuppositions of Christianity itself.

itself as it rests upon the Church and its servants.

In Das Erdbeben in Chili, however, and Der Findling, the Catholic church and its various institutions seem to be treated with considerable harshness. In Das Erdbeben in Chili it is a Catholic priest who incites "die ganze im Tempel Jesu versammelte Christenheit" to the brutal murder which takes place just outside of the cathedral. And in Der Findling the bishop and Carmelite monks are guilty of consistently indulging in a whole array of vices, such as sexual immorality, greed, and bigotry, and of unabashedly betraying the trust of those whose confessions they hear. The Church as depicted in this Novelle has literally no redeeming features; it is marked by total and unrelieved corruption. Little wonder that Piachi so violently rejects its final ministrations!

The fact that Kleist's depiction of the Church varies so radically from Die heilige Cäcilie, for example, to Der Findling, prompts the question as to whether or not his Novellen convey in any significant way his personal attitudes concerning the institutional church. Does the tone of Die heilige Cäcilie indicate that in his later years Kleist feels more favorably disposed toward Catholicism than he previously has felt? Does the portrayal of the Catholic Church in Der Findling reflect Kleist's own negative judgment on current or past shortcomings in this same church? Or is he a totally objective narrator who makes no moral judgments whatsoever, who incorporates none of his personal feelings or prejudices into the Novelle, but simply is interested in telling a good story?

Some critics, such as Wilhelm Herzog, insist that in these three Novellen Kleist is in no way interested in passing either

positive or negative judgment on the Church or certain of its practices. Thus Herzog writes:

> Aber Kleist war als Künstler von allen katholisierenden wie rationalistischen Tendenzen gleichweit entfernt. Er polemisierte nicht. Und sowenig er die Kirche beleidigen wollte, wenn er im Findling die Kurtisane Xaviera Tartini als Beischläferin ihres Bischofs bezeichnet, sowenig verteidigt oder glorifiziert er jetzt ihre Einrichtungen, wenn er die Gewalt der italienischen Musik auf die Gemüter der Gläubigen und Ungläubigen schildert.[45]

Similarly, in regard to Die heilige Cäcilie, Ernst Kayka,[46] Heinrich Meyer-Benfey,[47] and Joachim Maass[48] all are among those who insist that it is in no way Kleist's intention to catholicize by means of this Novelle. Nor, according to Meyer-Benfey, does his use of the church-scene in Das Erdbeben in Chili, on the other hand, reveal in any way personal animosity or ill-will on his part toward the Catholic Church.[49]

Other writers, however, firmly maintain that Kleist is not merely an objective narrator, but is instead concerned with passing judgment on the people and events he portrays, and also on the Church. Thus Benno von Wiese in his analysis of Das Erdbeben in Chili, writes: "So lässt sich nicht länger verkennen, dass der Erzähler die gesellschaftliche und kirchliche Ordnung im Chili des 17. Jahrhunderts keineswegs nur sachlich schildert, sondern mit verhaltener, im Erzählen nur gebändigter Erbitterung in ihrer ganzen Unmenschlichkeit an den Pranger stellt. . . ."[50] Walter Silz makes a similar comment:

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[45]Herzog, 603.

[46]Kayka, 144.

[47]Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, Kleists Leben und Werke (Göttingen: Otto Hapke Verlag, 1911), 371.

[48]Maass, 334.

[49]Meyer-Benfey, 216.

[50]Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka (2 vols.; Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1956-62), II, 56.

in Das Erdbeben in Chili, he writes, Kleist "voices a rare bitterness at the bloodthirst of a Christian congregation. . . ."[51] Some critics even claim to detect in his Novellen traces of Kleist's own religious development and changing attitudes toward the Catholic Church. Thus Silz sees Die heilige Cäcilie as "a story of unmistakably Catholic tendency," a Novelle which constitutes "a remarkable document for the increase of Kleist's religiosity toward the end of his life. . . ."[52] And Friedrich Braig predictably enough views Cäcilie as a type of culmination of the poet's spiritual pilgrimage toward Catholic Christianity:

> Im Dominikanerdom zu Santiago findet der junge Kleist noch nicht die Religion der Liebe und Erlösung, sowenig, wie er sie einst als junger Aufklärer in Dresden und Würzburg gefunden hat. Die Kirche steht im Dienste der Leidenschaft und des Bösen wie im Findling. In der Novelle von der heiligen Cäcilie im Cäciliendom zu Aachen ist die Musik im Bunde mit dem Heiligen: das ist der Weg der eigenen Wandlung des Dichters.[53]

Cäcilie, according to Braig, is Kleist's most personal confession.[54] In this Novelle ". . . sieht er in der Kirche selbst nicht mehr den Geist der Willkür und Bosheit, sondern die Macht des erlösenden Gottes auf Erden. . . . So hat sich der diabolische Geist des Findlings," Braig concludes, "gewandelt zur Erkenntnis Gottes und seiner Kirche auf Erden."[55]

In reaction to such diversity of opinion, the first point to be made is that Kleist is not a totally objective narrator, one

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[51]Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 17.

[52]Silz, Early German Romanticism, 148.

[53]Braig, 448. [54]Braig, 480. [55]Braig, 481.

who intentionally avoids making personal judgments within the framework of the Novelle. In Das Erdbeben in Chili, for example, although he does not arise with holy zeal as an Old Testament prophet to condemn and judge, it is obvious that his sympathies are with Jeronimo and Josephe and their protectors. He clearly does not condone the behavior of the priest or the Christian congregation. And although the tone of Der Findling appears to be singularly cool and objective, the actions of the servants of the church plainly are self-condemnatory. Kleist need not intrude into the narrative to pass judgment; he depicts the wretched behavior of bishop, priest, and monk with such bald directness that no such judgment is required.

However, it is also obvious that Kleist writes neither of these two Novellen merely to vent his anger on the Catholic Church. He only reacts to its inhumanity and corruption as he would to that of any other historical institution. It just so happens that in both Catholic Chili and Italy the church was the dominant institution in social and cultural life, and that it was therefore particularly susceptible to misuse of its power. But Kleist's first intention clearly is not to expose ecclesiastical shortcomings. His primary concern is with his characters, with Jeronimo and Josephe, with Piachi, Elvire and Nicolo, their confrontation with love, life and death, and the way in which they overcome or are destroyed.

If Kleist does in some measure intend in these two works to comment negatively on the Catholic Church, his criticisms are ultimately peripheral, since they are directed only against certain shortcomings in the attitudes and behavior of its adherents. Not that these are unimportant to Kleist; on the contrary, all throughout

his life he is particularly sensitive in matters of personal morality. But if he wished to make a frontal assault on Catholicism, he would have objected to such pivotal doctrines as the authority of the church, its doctrine of salvation, or its claim to be "die allein seligmachende Kirche." His alleged objections to the church in Das Erdbeben in Chili and Der Findling are not doctrinal, and as such are no expression of a personal, existential confrontation with the center of Catholic belief.

The same thing is true of Die heilige Cäcilie, in which the Catholic Church is cast in a considerably more favorable light. To claim this Novelle as a document witnessing to Kleist's inclination toward Catholicism is, again, unwarranted, if it means that he draws nearer in it to affirming Catholic dogma than previously. Nothing in the Novelle can serve to substantiate such a view. It is the power of church music, of the Italian Mass, which is illustrated with such dramatic poignancy. If any element in the Catholic complex is attractive to the mature Kleist, it is its impressive artistic legacy, its esthetic appeal. Cäcilie may well bear witness to his love for art,[56] coupled here with a desire to please his Catholic

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[56]Reinhold Steig and Heinrich Meyer-Benfey see this Novelle in part as Kleist's protest against the secularization edict handed down by Hardenberg in the autumn of 1810, an edict which Kleist allegedly felt would pose a threat to the preservation of the Church's artistic monuments and its broader heritage of the arts. Thus Meyer-Benfey comments: "Es ist der historische Sinn, die Liebe zum deutschen Altertum und die Ehrfurcht vor allen echten Kunst, die hier ihren Protest erhebt, noch mehr im Namen der Kunst als in dem der Kirche." (Meyer-Benfey, 370)

friend Adam Müller.[57] But to interpret it as a personal religious confession is to go considerably too far.

And finally, to reiterate, the more mature Kleist's religious perspective places him outside of the Church, but not in direct conflict with it. The seat of religious authority, as seen in his dramas in particular, is the Absolute, resident deep within, as it expresses itself through the voice of "Gefühl." That the Church may have esthetic appeal, or on the other hand, that its practical life may leave something to be desired, is ultimately peripheral, as far as Kleist is concerned. He is not finally kept out of the church by some vision of its inferior morality, as seen perhaps in Das Erdbeben in Chili or Der Findling. It is rather that his religious presuppositions are totally different from those of traditional Christianity, and that the object of his faith is in essence other than that of the historical Christian faith. Works such as Amphitryon and Der Zweikampf tell a good deal more about Kleist's personal religious struggles than do any of the three Novellen discussed above.

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[57] The immediate occasion for the writing of this Novelle was the baptism of Müller's infant child, Cäcilie, in November of 1810.

CHAPTER VII

DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND THE LIFE BEYOND

The Traditional Christian View

> I believe . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Death, according to the traditional Christian view, does not mean man's final and ultimate annihilation. It is instead to be followed by the return of Christ and the resurrection of a renewed body which, together with the believer's soul, "shall immediately be taken up to Christ, its head,"[1] there to live in all eternity, and to be part of a new and sinless creation.

The essence of eternal life in orthodox Christian thought is unity with Jesus Christ, a unity whose beginnings can be experienced in time. Death and the resurrection, however are to usher in a full and perfect communion with God. Thus the believer is admonished by John Calvin to "go with alacrity to death," for "by death we are recalled . . . to inhabit our own country."[2] Calvin, though emphasizing that this life is to be "deservedly reckoned among the Divine blessings,"[3] warns against exclusive preoccupation with temporal

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[1]Quoted from the "Heidelberg Catechism" as found in Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (3 vols., 4th edition; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), III, 325.

[2]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen (2 vols., Seventh American Edition; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), I, 782.

[3]Calvin, I, 779.

existence. The believer, he stresses, must never forget that he is full citizen of another country.

In the traditional Christian view, heaven is a place of sinlessness, and thus of perfect knowledge and perfect joy. It is a reality, the believer maintains, only because of the sacrificial death of Christ, which made man's reunion with God possible.

Kleist's View

The dual suicide of Kleist and Henriette Vogel which occurred on November 22, 1811, caused perhaps a greater public stir than did any other single event or undertaking in the entire span of the poet's troubled life. Both domestic and foreign newspapers carried lengthy accounts of what the London Times termed "the tragical adventure of M. Kleist, the celebrated Prussian poet, and Madame Vogel."[4] Some of the articles went to such detail as to report even the number of cups of coffee the pair allegedly drank prior to their death! The King of Prussia himself became involved in the affair by vigorously objecting to the tone of one newspaper report in which the public was admonished "nicht zwei Wesen lieblos zu verdammen, welche die Liebe und Reinheit selbst waren."[5] "Wenn es jedem, dessen sittliches Gefühl erstorben ist," the king protested, "freistehen soll, seine verkehrten Ansichten in Blättern, die in jedermanns Hände kommen, laut und mit anmassender Verachtung Besserdenkender zu predigen, so werden alle Bemühungen, Religiosität und Sittlichkeit

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[4]Heinrich von Kleists Lebensspuren, ed. Helmut Sembdner (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1957), 419.

[5]Lebensspuren, 376.

im Volke neu zu beleben, vergebens sein. . . ."[6]

But Kleist's death, when all of the evidence is considered, surely should not come as a shocking surprise. Not only had he at various times in letters and private conversation discussed the possiblity of suicide; his creative works too reveal a steady concern with and awareness of the inescapable power and significance of death in human existence. "Von Jugend auf," writes Günter Blöcker, "lebte er im Bewusstsein des Todes, und zwar eines Todes, über den man gebieten kann."[7] Anneliese Bodensohn also stresses the fact that every aspect of Kleist's life was permeated with the force of death.

> Der Tod ist nicht nur endlich sich öffnender Ausgang für diesen Dichter, sondern leitende Ermöglichung seines Werks. Die Form seines Schaffens, die "Grundform," der sich alle seine "Formen" entringen. Auch da also, wo man bei Kleist den Tod nicht eigentlich "greifen" kann, benennen kann, ist er als "Unsichtbarer" "am Werk" und "im" Werk. Ist er da als geheimnisvoller Wellenschlag, der nicht zu sehen, wohl aber zu hören ist für den, der zu lauschen versteht. Ist er, der Tod, da als verborgene Ader, in der der innerlichste Puls des Kleistschen Werkes lebt. . . . So ist Kleist der Tod schon in diesem Leben so nah, dass von daher dieses Leben das "Andere" zu werden droht, das Fremde, Sonderbare, Verworrene, Unbegreifliche, Dämonische.[8]

And this is the insight of numerous other writers as well.

It is obvious that no discussion of Kleist's religious orientation can be complete if it does not take into account his view of death and the life beyond. Consequently, the following paragraphs will be devoted to an examination of these elements

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[6]Lebensspuren, 376.

[7]Günter Blöcker, Heinrich von Kleist oder das absolute Ich (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1960), 114.

[8]Anneliese Bodensohn, Heinrich von Kleists Begegnung mit dem Tode (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1951), 63.

of his religious belief.

Kleist's Concept of Death and the Jenseits prior to his Kantkrise

In his well-known letter to Wilhelmine dated March 22, 1801, the letter in which Kleist tells her of the distress occasioned by his study of "die neuere sogenannte Kantische Philosophie," there is also contained a brief description of the basic contours of his earlier religious belief.

> Ich hatte schon als Knabe (mich dünkt am Rhein durch eine Schrift von Wieland)[9] mir den Gedanken angeeignet, dass die Vervollkommnung der Zweck der Schöpfung wäre. Ich glaubte, dass wir einst nach dem Tode von der Stufe der Vervollkommnung, die wir auf diesem Sterne erreichten, auf einem andern weiter fortschreiten würden, und dass wir den Schatz von Wahrheiten, den wir hier sammelten, auch dort einst brauchen könnten. Aus diesen Gedanken bildete sich so nach und nach eine eigene Religion. . . .[10]

His earlier letters contain at least one additional reference to this Sternenglaube. In November of 1800, in the midst of an intense

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[9]It cannot be known with final certainty whether Kleist actually appropriated these beliefs from Wieland, or whether they may instead have been transmitted to him by Christian Ernst Wünsch. Ernst Kayka, for example, suggests that Wieland gave Kleist only the Leibnizian idea that perfection is the goal of creation, while Wünsch is responsible for the particulars of his "Sternenglaube" (see Ernst Kayka, Kleist und die Romantik [Berlin: A. Duncker, 1906], 18). Friedrich Braig also makes Wünsch at least partially at fault for leading Kleist "zu dem Wahne eines Fortlebens nach dem Tode . . . in einer Form, zu der auch der gewaltsame Tod den Zutritt gab" (Friedrich Braig, Heinrich von Kleist [München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1925], 28). Xylander too detects the strong influence of Wünsch in the development of Kleist's "Sternenglaube," while emphasizing at the same time that this belief was one commonly held throughout the 18th century (see Oskar Ritter von Xylander, Heinrich von Kleist und J. J. Rousseau ["Germanische Studien," Heft 93; Berlin: Verlag Emil Ebering, 1937], 208).

[10]Werke, II, 633. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, volume and page references to Kleist's Werke will be made in parentheses.

inner struggle as to whether or not he should take an "Amt," he writes: "Und wenn ich auch auf dieser Erde nirgends meinen Platz finden sollte, so finde ich vielleicht auf einem andern Sterne einen um so bessern" (II, 586). In short, the younger Kleist believes that after death on this earth, the life of the individual continues on another planet, where the process of perfection begun here will be continued, as the individual raises himself nearer and nearer to the level of ultimate perfection, to the "Gottheit." This belief in the continuity between this life and the next, and the obligation of accumulating in the here and now a "Schatz von Wahrheiten" to be used in the Jenseits provides the religious basis for Kleist's earlier thought and activity.

It would be grossly inaccurate to suggest, however, that the tendency of Kleist's early religious thought is predominantly other-worldly. His emphasis is rather on this life and a responsible utilization of current opportunities. This distinctly diesseitig concern is at least in part due to the very nature of his Sternenglaube, which makes progress in the future life directly dependent upon the level of achievement attained in this life. Thus his concept of the Jenseits does not promote passivity or mystical speculation; it serves instead to energize, for the best preparation for the next life is an involvement in meaningful activity here and now. His Sternenglaube provides focus for his own earthly existence and does not serve to draw him away from the challenges of the present.

This emphasis on a responsible reaction to the demands of the present life finds perhaps its strongest expression in Kleist's letters to Wilhelmine written in September, 1800, the time of his

"Würzburger Reise." In reaction to what he sees in Catholic Würzburg, "wo man über die Andacht die Tätigkeit fast vergisst," (II, 566) and the example of his friend Brockes, "der unaufhörlich mit der Natur im Streit ist, weil er, wie er sagt, seine ewige Bestimmung nicht herausfinden kann, und daher nichts für seine irdische tut," (II, 566) he admonishes his patient fiance:

> Also wage Dich mit Deinem Verstande nie über die Grenzen Deines Lebens hinaus. Sei ruhig über die Zukunft. Was Du für dieses Erdenleben tun sollst, das kannst Du begreifen, was Du für die Ewigkeit tun sollst, nicht; und so kann denn auch keine Gottheit mehr von Dir verlangen, als die Erfüllung Deiner Bestimmung auf dieser Erde. Schränke Dich also ganz für diese kurze Zeit ein. Kümmre Dich nicht um Deine Bestimmung nach dem Tode, weil Du darüber leicht Deine Bestimmung auf dieser Erde vernachlässigen könntest. (II, 565)

And again:

> Alle echte Aufklärung des Weibes besteht am Ende wohl nur darin, meine liebe Freundin: über die Bestimmung seines irdischen Lebens vernünftig nachdenken zu können.
>
> Über die Bestimmung unseres ewigen Daseins nachzudenken . . . das, liebe Freundin, ist selbst für Männer unfruchtbar und oft verderblich. . . . Solche Männer . . . leben in der Zukunft, und vergessen darüber, was die Gegenwart von ihnen fordert. (II, 315)

And a few paragraphs farther on:

> Ich schränke mich daher mit meiner Tätigkeit ganz für dieses Erdenleben ein. Ich will mich nicht um meine Bestimmung nach dem Tode kümmern, aus Furcht darüber meine Bestimmung für dieses Leben zu vernachlässigen. (II, 317)

Kleist goes so far in stressing the necessity of fulfilling one's "Pflicht" here on earth that for the moment he terms belief in eternal life quite dispensable.

> Dass ein Gott sei, dass es ein ewiges Leben, einen Lohn für die Tugend, eine Strafe für das Laster gebe, das alles sind Sätze, die in jenem nicht gegründet sind, und die wir also entbehren können. Denn gewiss sollen wir sie nach dem Willen der Gottheit selbst entbehren können, weil sie es uns selbst unmöglich gemacht hat, es einzusehen und zu begreifen. Würdest

> Du nicht mehr tun, was recht ist, wenn der Gedanke an Gott und Unsterblichkeit nur ein Traum wäre? Ich nicht. (II, 317)

The vital thing is that one do his duty now, that one respond positively to present challenges.

Kleist is not hereby cancelling out his Sternenglaube; after he has done his duty, he allows himself "mit stiller Hoffnung an einen Gott zu denken, der mich sieht, und an eine frohe Ewigkeit, die meiner wartet; denn zu beiden fühle ich mich doch mit meinem Glauben hingezogen, den mein Herz mir ganz zusichert und mein Verstand mehr bestätigt, als widerspricht" (II, 317). And quite in harmony with the tenets of his "Religion," he once again affirms: "Dabei bin ich überzeugt, gewiss in den grossen ewigen Plan der Natur einzugreifen, wenn ich nur den Platz erfülle, auf den sie mich in dieser Erde setzte" (II, 318). But he in no way will allow concern with the Jenseits to dull his sensitivity to the demands of present existence.

Kleist's views on the afterlife clearly bear little resemblance to those of historical Christianity. He obviously does not believe in heaven as conceived within the orthodox Christian tradition. Life after death involves for him first of all continued striving toward perfection, the ultimate goal of the entire creation. An approximate equivalent of heaven in Kleist's early eschatology is this state of perfection to which the individual finally will attain. But such "Vollkommenheit" is the result of conscious intellectual and ethical striving, not, as in Christian thought, a gift of Divine Grace. Then too, when Kleist expresses the longing to achieve "eine Stufe näher der Gottheit," i.e., to approximate Divine

perfection, he is not expressing a wish for personal union with God in Christ, for the restoration of perfect communion with the Father as a result of forgiveness. He is instead concerned with striving toward an abstract ideal which, he is convinced, lies within his reach.

Nor is there in his early religious thought provision for eternal punishment. The individual after death will merely pick up where he left off in this life, and if he accomplished little on earth he simply will have a longer road to travel on the next planet. As was noted previously, Kleist believes in a kind of immanent justice built into the universe, but this entails no such thing as eternal punishment. Nevertheless, it is obviously to a man's advantage to make the most of this life, to exploit it fully, in the best sense of the term, for he thereby is accelerating his own progress, his development toward perfection.

As for death, Kleist himself came to know it as a painful reality already early in his boyhood. His father died in 1788, when young Kleist was but ten years old, and he lost his mother less than five years later. Yet his earliest letters surely do not reveal a preoccupation with death. True, one of the "Denkübungen" discussed in his correspondence with Wilhelmine centers about the question: "Welcher von zwei Eheleuten, deren jeder seine Pflichten gegen den andern erfüllt, am meisten bei dem früheren Tode des andern verliert. . ." (II, 506). And in a letter dated August 16, 1800, he writes to her: "Werden <u>wir</u> uns scheiden? <u>Wir nicht</u>, mein liebes Mädchen. Aber <u>einer</u> wird uns freilich scheiden, <u>einer</u>, der auch scharz aussehen

soll, wie man sagt, ob er gleich kein Priester ist. Doch der scheidet immer nur die Körper" (II, 520). Nevertheless, it is obvious that neither of these relatively isolated quotations results from an immediate, pressing, personal concern with the problem of death in his own life or in human existence in general.

Nor is it particularly surprising that the primary emphasis in this earlier correspondence is not upon death. As is noted above, young Kleist sees life on this earth as the supreme challenge, one to be met with vigor, with disciplined energy. His own religious perspective gives life coherence and meaning, and he has no doubt that if one takes his destiny in hand and, heeding the voice of "Vernunft," constructs a "Lebensplan," all will be well. The formulation of such a "Lebensplan," he writes Ulrike, insures both "der sichere Genuss der Gegenwart und die Ruhe für die Zukunft" (II, 491). And if one finds life so engaging, and feels that he has things so totally under control, it is little wonder that the question of death recedes into the background. The demands and promise of life are so engrossing that for the moment, at least, death becomes of no more than secondary importance.

Then too, young Kleist does not appear to regard death first of all as a threat. It does mark the termination of physical existence, but the spirit lives on in other worlds and continues its growth. Thus death is a gateway to continued progress, not the termination of the life of the soul. Within the framework of Kleist's early religious orientation, death has but little sting, and thus need not be contemplated with apprehension.

But as time passes, and life becomes more problematical,

Kleist's mood and the tone of his letters slowly change. His most intense early struggles have to do with the matter of whether or not he should take an "Amt." Family pressure and the financial obligations involved in his contemplated marriage to Wilhelmine combine to dictate, on the one hand, that he seek a government office, while his own unique "Interesse" demands that he be free to pursue his own holy goal, that he devote all of his time and energy to the fulfillment of his "Bestimmung." Not only do those who attempt to counsel him oppose his plans; they do not even really understand his basic motivation, the holy urgency of his concern. "Niemand versteht es," he writes to Ulrike, "das haben mir tausend Erfahrungen bestätigt" (II, 603). No one understands that the combined pressures on Kleist to take an "Amt" constitute a threat to the very center of his life; no one realizes that yielding to these pressures would involve nothing short of self-betrayal. Only Kleist himself can feel this.

Caught in the anxiety resulting from this fearful predicament, he writes to Wilhelmine in November, 1800: "Und wenn ich auch auf dieser Erde nirgends meinen Platz finden sollte, so finde ich vielleicht auf einem andern Sterne einen um so bessern" (II, 586). And later in the same month he makes a similar statement in a letter to his sister Ulrike: "Also sei auch Du so ruhig, mein liebes Ulrickchen, als ich es bin, und denke mit mir, dass wenn ich hier keinen Platz finden kann, ich vielleicht auf einem andern Sterne einen um so bessern finden werde" (II, 603). These thinly-veiled references to death are considerably more ominous in tone, and mark the beginning of a series of many such references. Obviously, the

above comments scarcely express an essentially Christian sentiment, a pious longing for union with a Heavenly Father. They result instead from a feeling that life gives rise to unbearable tensions, that it cannot in fact be readily mastered, and that therefore flight from it may be in order. If he cannot fully realize his true self in this world, there is always the next one, and the possibility that conditions may be better there. But Kleist is not yet fully ready to give in. He postpones his journey to another star for eleven long years, years of repeated crises and personal suffering.

Death and the Future Life in Kleist's Works and Later Experience

With the Kantkrise in March, 1801, Kleist's earlier religious beliefs and goals are for the most part destroyed. Thus his life has been deprived of sense and meaning, and in great anxiety he seeks new direction, new purpose, for he cannot simply drift along from day to day. But he search is a difficult one, and the course of his entire life after the Kantkrise is marked by one long series of crises.

It is particularly in such times of stress that Kleist's letters contain references to death. For example, while on his trip to Paris in 1801, a trip undertaken in a search for new goals, or at least for distraction from his current "Angst," he is caught on shipboard in a violent storm on the Rhein. Struck by the spectacle of fear and the selfish concentration on self-preservation which he observes among the ship's passengers, he writes:

> Ach, es ist nichts ekelhafter, als diese Furcht vor dem Tode. Das Leben ist das einzige Eigentum, das nur dann etwas wert ist,

> wenn wir es nicht achten. . . . Und doch--o wie unbegreiflich ist der Wille, der über uns waltet! --Dieses rätselhafte Ding, das wir besitzen, wir wissen nicht von wem, das uns fortführt, wir wissen nicht wohin, das unser Eigentum ist, wir wissen nicht, ob wir darüber schalten dürfen, eine Habe, die nichts wert ist, wenn sie uns etwas wert ist, ein Ding, wie ein Widerspruch, flach und tief, öde und reich, würdig und verächtlich, vieldeutig und unergründlich, ein Ding, das jeder wegwerfen möchte, wie ein unverständliches Buch, sind wir nicht durch ein Naturgesetz gezwungen es zu lieben? Wir müssen vor der Vernichtung beben, die doch nicht so qualvoll sein kann, als oft das Dasein, und indessen mancher das traurige Geschenk des Lebens beweint, muss er es durch Essen und Trinken ernähren und die Flamme vor dem Erlöschen hüten, die ihn weder erleuchtet, noch erwärmt. (II, 670)

Then there is his letter of final farewell to Wilhelmine dated May 20, 1802, which closes with the words: "Ich habe keinen andern Wunsch als bald zu sterben" (II, 726). And after burning the manuscript of Guiskard, which he has so desperately but unsuccessfully struggled to complete, he informs Ulrike of his plans to join the French forces set to invade England, and thus to find death. "Unser aller Verderben lauert über den Meeren, ich frohlocke bei der Aussicht auf das unendlich prächtige Grab" (II, 737). Add to these his comments on his own impending death, which will be discussed in later paragraphs, and it becomes immediately obvious that the question of death looms large in his thought during the last ten years of his life.[11]

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[11] It is interesting in this regard to note the comment made by "eine unbekannte Freundin" some thirty-five years after Kleist's death: "Von frühester Jugend an hatte Kleist sich mit dem Gedanken vertraut gemacht, dereinst freiwillig zu enden--doch nicht als Feigling, der das Leben nicht mehr zu ertragen vermag. . ." (Lebensspuren, 350). Whether the unidentified friend making this statement is a reliable source obviously cannot be known.

Kleist himself, in his very last letter to Marie von Kleist, writes: "Erinnerst Du Dich wohl, dass ich Dich mehrmals gefragt habe, ob Du mit mir sterben willst?--Aber Du sagtest immer nein. . ." (II, 888).

It is also known with a substantial degree of certainty that in 1805 Kleist cared for one Hartmann von Schlotheim, whose attempt

In view of the frequency and earnestness of this later concern with death, one is led to inquire as to Kleist's post-Kantian view of the afterlife. Does his encounter with the "sogenannte Kantische Philosophie" result in a radical alteration of his earlier Sternenglaube? Most critics feel that it does not. Meyer-Benfey, for example, makes reference to "Kleists 'Religion,' der eigentümliche Unsterblichkeits- und Sternenglaube, an dem er stets festgehalten hat"[12] --even until death. A second critic, Oskar Ritter von Xylander, writes in a similar vein,[13] though suggesting that after the Kantkrise the function of this "Sternenglaube" in Kleist's thought is quite different from that of pre-Kantian days. No longer, he maintains, does it serve "als Ansporn zum rastlosen Streben nach Göttern, die über das Grab hinaus Geltung haben, sondern als Mahnung, das 'Streben' zu lassen," or as a comforting hope in the face of a deficient "Diesseits."[14] Ernst Kayka too points to the survival of the "Sternenglaube," but notes that whereas it formerly had its basis in "Verstand," in Kleist's later thought it is grounded upon "Gefühl" and "Phantasieanschauung."[15] And John Blankenagel, a fourth critic, agrees substantially with those just cited. "In view of the

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at suicide had failed. The precise nature of his reaction to this attempted suicide cannot be determined. Marie von Kleist suggests that Kleist reacted negatively to it (see Lebensspuren, 97), but she scarcely qualifies as an objective observer. Caroline von Briest, on the other hand, suggests that Kleist appeared to condone this deed, "wodurch er freilich die Menschen skandalisierte. . ." (Lebensspuren, 97).

[12]Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, Kleists Leben und Werke (Göttingen: Otto Hapke Verlag, 1911), 386.

[13]von Xylander, 259.

[14]von Xylander, 249.

[15]Kayka, 132.

marked transformations which Kleist's views underwent in a number of other aspects," he writes, "it is noteworthy that his conception of immortality seems essentially to have remained unchanged."[16]

Kleist's later letters do contain a good deal of evidence suggesting continued belief in some kind of personal immortality. In one letter in particular he still appears, to an extent, at least, to view the future life in terms of his earlier Sternenglaube, i.e., as existence upon another star. In July of 1801, some four months after the climax of his Kantkrise, he writes to Karoline von Schlieben:

> Ach, liebe Freundin, wenn Sie sich Tränen ersparen wollen, so erwarten Sie wenig von dieser Erde. Sie kann nichts geben, was ein reines Herz wahrhaft glücklich machen könnte. Blicken Sie zuweilen, wenn es Nacht ist, in den Himmel. Wenn Sie auf diesem Sterne keinen Platz finden können, der Ihrer würdig ist, so finden Sie vielleicht auf einem andern einen um so bessern" (II, 665).

Five years later he again comments on life, death, and the life beyond in terms suggestive of his earlier religious concepts.

> Denke nur, diese unendliche Fortdauer! Myriaden von Zeiträumen, jedweder ein Leben, und für jedweden eine Erscheinung, wie diese Welt! Wie doch das kleine Sternchen heissen mag, das man auf dem Sirius, wenn der Himmel klar ist, sieht? Und dieses ganze ungeheure Firmament nur ein Stäubchen gegen die Unendlichkeit! O Rühle, sage mir, ist dies ein Traum? Zwischen je zwei Lindenblättern, wenn wir abends auf dem Rücken liegen, eine Aussicht, an Ahndungen reicher, als Gedanken fassen, und Worte sagen können. Komm, lass uns etwas Gutes tun, und dabei sterben! Einen der Millionen Tode, die wir schon gestorben sind, und noch sterben werden. Es ist, als ob wir aus einem Zimmer in das andere gehen. (II, 768)

However, in neither of the above quotations does Kleist refer to this future life on another planet as a time of gradual perfection,

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[16]John Blankenagel, The Attitude of Heinrich von Kleist toward the Problems of Life (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1917), 15.

of continuation of the development begun in the Diesseits, as he did prior to his encounter with Kantian philosophy. Thus Blankenagel's claim that "his conception of immortality seems essentially to have remained unchanged" is only in part true. He does indeed appear to have retained belief in some kind of immortality, in a better and happier Jenseits, but it obviously is not the same relatively well-defined life on another star which the younger Kleist contemplated.

And as his life nears its abrupt end, his descriptions of the beyond reveal less and less similarity to those emanating from his earlier Sternenglaube. In the closing lines of a letter to Ulrike dated May 3, 1809, he does not refer to the future life in terms of existence upon another planet. He simply comments that his first thought "von jenseits" will be of Ulrike--"wenn es erlaubt ist" (II, 826). Nor do any of the letters written immediately prior to his death make reference to the Jenseits as life on another star, a life of gradual progress toward perfection. Heaven, as he contemplates it, has at best rather misty contours. Its joys, in one passage, must be the result of total self-sacrifice (II, 885). And in another letter it is termed a place of complete reconciliation, of unbroken interpersonal bonds--"jene bessere Welt, wo wir uns alle, mit der Liebe der Engel, einander werden aus Herz drücken können" (II, 888). In still another letter he writes:

> Leben Sie wohl, unsre liebe, liebe Freundin, und seien Sie auf Erden, wie es gar wohl möglich ist, recht glücklich! Wir, unsererseits, wollen nichts von den Freuden dieser Welt wissen und träumen lauter himmlische Fluren und Sonnen, in deren Schimmer wir, mit langen Flügeln an den Schultern, umherwandeln werden. (II, 886)

None of these comments reveal either a specifically Christian concept of heaven or a concept essentially in harmony with his earliest views. Perhaps the most one can say about the Jenseits as his later letters describe it is that it is a better place and more beautiful, one in which current difficulties will no more exist.

Although death is a relatively prominent force in Kleist's dramas and Novellen, there are but few traces of his early Sternenglaube in these creative works. To the best of my knowledge, only in Die Verlobung in St. Domingo, in which it is said of Toni that "ihre Seele [war] schon zu besseren Sternen entflohn" (II, 194) does Kleist even use the vocabulary common to his pre-Kantian eschatological concepts. Nor is it particularly surprising that this is the case. In the first place, there is the simple matter of chronology. All of his works originate after the Kantkrise, which marks the destruction of his previous religious orientation and the heart of his Sternenglaube, namely belief in continuity of progress from this life on through the next. And secondly, most of his works are set into either a distinctly Christian milieu or into Greek antiquity. Later 18th-century Enlightenment religious views would scarcely fit well into either context.

Of perhaps even greater significance is the fact that there is in Kleist's works very little stress on the Jenseits at all, as traditionally understood. None of his later characters in particular is motivated by a predominantly eschatological concern, and none of them, when faced with the existential reality of death or a threat to personal dignity or integrity, can appeal beyond the present

existence to the hope of a future life in which wrongs will be righted, in which justice--or mercy--will be meted out, in which death will be overcome. Their concern is first of all with this life, this death, this person.

Thus the same Prince of Homburg who so piously prays prior to battle cannot, when faced with death, take refuge in the Christian hope of heaven:

> Das Leben nennt der Derwisch eine Reise,
> Und eine kurze. Freilich! Von zwei Spannen
> Diesseits der Erde nach zwei Spannen drunter.
> Ich will auf halbem Weg mich niederlassen!
> Wer heut sein Haupt noch auf der Schulter trägt,
> Hängt es schon morgen zitternd auf den Leib,
> Und übermorgen liegts bei seiner Ferse.
> Zwar, eine Sonne, sagt man, scheint dort auch,
> Und über buntre Felder noch, als hier:
> Ich glaubs; nur schade, dass das Auge modert,
> Das diese Herrlichkeit erblicken soll. (I, 686, ll. 1286-96)

Michael Kohlhaas, trampled upon by his adversary, is unable to leave justice to God, to take refuge in the hope of a hereafter in which good and evil will meet their due. He pursues his rights now, in the painfully concrete present. And the "Ruhe und Zufriedenheit" of his last days emanate from present wellbeing, not from the hope of a Christian heaven. Nor does Kleist himself mitigate the senseless cruelty of death in such works as Das Erdbeben in Chili or Die Familie Schroffenstein by reference to reunion in a world beyond. Death in these works stands as a blatantly unalterable fact, although those who die may be transfigured, in a sense, by their conduct in meeting it. And one could go on citing other works. Kleist's figures seek to confront life and maintain themselves in the here and now. This, for the most part, is in practice the only reality they know.

This existential emphasis may appear at first blush to contradict the witness of Kleist's own letters, with their reference to "jene bessere Welt," (II, 888) to "himmlische Fluren und Sonnen," (II, 886) to future existence on another planet. Does the tone of his final letters in particular indicate an ultimate reorientation on his part? Is he in fact later in life fleeing the challenge of existence in favor of a fabled "heaven?"

In a sense, perhaps. According to his own testimony, however, he takes leave only after he has wrestled with life at great length, has wrung from it all he can, has been bruised to the point of death--in short, has run what he feels to be his course. He does not feel that he is fleeing the confrontation; only after it has been completed does he step back, survey it, and leave. Like Kohlhaas and Homburg, he is eager to go from the scene of conflict when, in his judgment, the fighting is over. Whether his judgment is unclouded is another question. But there clearly is no uncertainty about it in his own mind.

Generally speaking, Kleist in his post-Kantian years does not regard death as a threat, as something to be feared. True, in July of 1801 he writes at some length of the fear of death which he observes during the storm of the Rhine, a fear which he apparently shares, at least in part, with his fellows (see II, 670ff.). But most of his comments about death are quite different in tone.

In his farewell letter to Wilhelmine, for example, he expresses a longing for death, not fear of it: "Ich habe keinen andern Wunsch als bald zu sterben," (II, 726) he writes. A year and a half later, after burning his Guiskard manuscript and resolving to

seek death in French military service, he exclaims: "Ich frohlocke bei der Aussicht auf das unendlich-prächtige Grab" (II, 737). In a less exhuberant spirit he writes in 1806: "Komm, lass uns etwas Gutes tun, und dabei sterben! Einen der Millionen Tode, die wir schon gestorben sind, und noch sterben werden" (II, 768). And then there are the statements he makes in the final days of his own life, his reference to the "Triumphgesang, den meine Seele in diesem Augenblick des Todes anstimmt," (II, 885) and his prayer of thanksgiving for "den herrlichsten und wollüstigsten aller Tode" (II, 887). In short, death seems to have held few terrors for Kleist.

The figures in his dramas and Novellen also tend, for the most part, to regard death without anxiety. By way of exception one thinks immediately of the Prince of Homburg and the "Todesfurchtszene," but the attitude the prince reveals in this scene reflects, of course, only an intermediate stage in his transformation. Ultimately he affirms his death and joys in the prospect of immortality. Penthesilea is another Kleistian figure who meets death totally without fear, who goes so far as to will her own demise. Of Michael Kohlhaas we read: "Demnach glich nichts der Ruhe und Zufriedenheit seiner letzten Tage," (II, 100) and are told that even on the place of execution his eyes shone (II, 102). And then there is Toni in Die Verlobung in St. Domingo, who exalted at the prospect of death for the sake of Gustav (II, 187). All of these figures reflect in one way or another the attitude of their creator toward death.

Kleist's journey into death was, on the one hand, but a short step. "Es ist, als ob wir aus einem Zimmer in das andere gehe," (II, 768) he writes to Rühle von Lilienstern in August, 1806.

One notes a similar attitude in the Prince of Homburg, for whom the distinction between time and eternity gradually melts away, who wishes almost at the moment of his execution to have a flower he may set into water "zu Hause." But for Kleist the step into the beyond is at the same time a far journey into a new and different country, a journey he resolves to undertake only after finding a traveling companion. Once such a person appears, however, he approaches death with nothing short of joy.

Kleist scholars identify the so-called "causes" of the poet's death in a number of ways. Rahmer lays the blame in large part to a deficient "vita sexualis,"[17] which allegedly results in a type of "Wahnsinn." Conrad takes a slightly different tack, suggesting that Kleist's death can be explained only as an action emanating from general despair, the despair of a person who has lost firm anchorage in this earth, who hovers "zwischen Himmel und Erde."[18] Wilbrandt[19] and Blankenagel[20] see adverse external circumstances as basic causes of his suicide, a view explicitly rejected by both Blöcker[21] and Ibel.[22] Heinz Ide pictures Kleist as dying "in der

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[17]Sigismund Rahmer, Heinrich von Kleist als Mensch und Dichter (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1909), 403.

[18]Hermann Conrad, Heinrich von Kleist als Mensch und Dichter (Berlin: Verlag von Hermann Walther, 1896), 38.

[19]Adolf Wilbrandt, Heinrich von Kleist (Nördlingen: Druck und Verlag der C. H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1863), 396.

[20]Blankenagel, The Attitude of Heinrich von Kleist toward the Problems of Life, 28.

[21]Blöcker, 105.

[22]Rudolf Ibel, Heinrich von Kleist--Schicksal und Botschaft (Hamburg: Holsten Verlag, 1961), 115.

Gewissheit, seine Bestimmung erfüllt zu haben,"[23] while Koch insists at some length that such fulfillment eludes him, that he dies because he can no longer find "einen Wert, . . . der seinem Leben Sinn geben konnte."[24] Instead of viewing Kleist's death in terms of fulfillment, Blankenagel appears to see it as an escape,[25] while Blöcker insists that both of these elements are present: "Es zeigt sich, dass sein Ende weder ein Sieg noch ein Scheitern ist, weder Selbstzerstörung noch Erhebung des Selbst ins Grenzenlose--es ist das alles zusammen."[26] Kleist, he continues, is "zum Tode reif" in both senses, "als ein Ruinierter und als einer, der sich vollendet hatte."[27] And Reinhold Schneider's view of Kleist's concept of death is basically in harmony with that of Blöcker: "Der Tod schwebte ihm von Anfang an nicht allein als Ende, als Flucht, als Abkehr ins Nichts vor, sondern als freier Entschluss zur Vollendung. . . ."[28]

It is this last analysis, that of Blöcker and Schneider, which seems to come closest to the truth. There is undeniably an element of escape in both his earlier and later contemplation of death. When in 1802 he writes to Wilhelmine that he has "keinen andern

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[23]Heinz Ide, Der junge Kleist (Würzburg: Holzner Verlag, 1961), 232.

[24]Friedrich Koch, Heinrich von Kleist, Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958), 306.

[25]Blankenagel, The Attitude of Heinrich von Kleist toward the Problems of Life, 28.

[26]Blöcker, 105. [27]Blöcker, 105.

[28]Reinhold Schneider, Kleists Ende (München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1946), 29.

Wunsch als bald zu sterben" (II, 726) it is obvious from the general tone of his letter that he finds his existence to be overwhelmingly burdensome, one from which he would readily flee. And when in the autumn of 1803 he eagerly contemplates death in French military service, (II, 737) it is because his titanic efforts to complete Guiskard have failed, and he would gladly escape from the fearful emptiness and frustration he feels. His final letters too suggest that life has bruised him beyond the point of endurance, and that consequently he has decided to leave it--to flee.

But Kleist also regards his death as a kind of fulfillment, as a culmination. "Ich sterbe, weil mir auf Erden nichts mehr zu lernen und zu erwerben übrig bleibt," (II, 885) he writes to Ulrike just two days prior to his suicide. He feels that he has totally run his earthly course and that therefore it is quite in order that he terminate his present existence. Thus his death is not motivated merely by despair and frustration; he is instead convinced that it is simply time to move on.

There is nothing in Kleist's post-Kantian ideas of death and the Jenseits which suggests essential affinity with orthodox Christian belief. His desire for death, as explored in preceeding paragraphs, surely is not an expression of longing for full communion with God in Christ. Furthermore, he enters death totally unencumbered by the prospect of judgment. Nor is this in any way surprising. The focus of his religion never was upon the basic Christian doctrines of sin and forgiveness. True, he thankfully prays to God during his latter days, but his thankfulness does not result from a consciousness

of a gracious Divine redemption. He is instead grateful because finally it is all over, finished. It is in this spirit that he embarks upon his "grosse Entdeckungsreise."

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The preceding examination of Kleist's letters, dramas, and Novellen demonstrates that there is ample warrant for terming his central concern essentially religious in nature. It has, however, at the same time become increasingly evident that ultimately neither the questions Kleist asks nor the answers at which he arrives reveal basic affinity with traditional Christian faith or thought. The religious problems with which the mature poet wrestles are defined outside of the framework of such basic Christian realities as sin and grace.

Kleist's earlier divergence from traditional Christianity is to a great extent conditioned by late 18th century Enlightenment religious currents. His rejection, for example, of the orthodox concepts of God, Christ, sin, and salvation clearly shows that he has been touched by the spirit of his age, as does his denial of the exclusive validity of the Christian faith and Christian religious usages. Furthermore, the positive content and emphases of his own earlier religion, with the high priority it assigns to intellectual endeavour on the one hand, and the urgency of its ethical concern on the other hand, reveal no less clearly the impact of Aufklärung religious thought. That this is the case should be in no way surprising, for Enlightenment influences were all-pervasive in the

religious and more broadly cultural milieu into which Kleist was born and in which he was reared. To acknowledge the significance of these influences in his thought and experience, however, is not to automatically label young Kleist a rationalistic Aufklärer, for to do so would involve the failure to appreciate adequately his clearly articulated emotional needs and the existential earnestness of his religious quest.

The Kantkrise which Kleist experiences early in 1801 eventually brings about a decisive religious reorientation. As a result of his encounter with the "neuere sogenannte Kantische Philosophie" he sees his previous religious goals shattered and the former avenues to ultimate truth cut off. Confronted with a puzzling and silently enigmatic God, and an equally puzzling and threatening world, he seeks existential certainty from a new, basically nonrational source. It is the testimony of his dramas and Novellen in particular that only an appeal to the divine interior principle, the "Ich," can give meaningful direction, can furnish the religious certainty without which he cannot go on. This is the gospel as articulated in Kleist's works, the "Evangelium des Gefühls." Only by listening to the voice of the Divine as it is resident deep within can one come to know his way and exist in harmony with the Ground of his existence, with the Divine Will.

Thus neither Kleist's pre-Kantian religion nor the "Evangelium des Gefühls" is conceived within the framework of historical Christianity. No single final reason can be advanced for his tacit rejection of an orthodox Christian religious perspective. It is apparent, however, that the conservative Lutheranism of his day

was dominated by a scholastic interest which tended to remove it from meaningful contact with concrete existence. And Kleist's needs clearly could not be met by a religion out of touch with the here and now. Then too, he was in his youth nurtured in a religious and philosophical tradition which assumed a superior and highly critical attitude toward any revealed religion and its dogma, Christianity included. As a result of this early training, traditional Christianity apparently never could qualify as a serious religious option for Kleist. At any rate, it is obvious that the mature poet takes a new pathway in his search for existential religious truth.

To a great extent, at least, Kleist stands as a person apart from his age, and thus is particularly exposed to the threat of Einsamkeit. His peculiar existential concern was not shared by his fellows who, schooled for the most part in the tradition of classical idealism, were unable either to appreciate his basic religious questions or understand the answers at which he arrived. Consequently, his religious and philosophical message was bound to fall on deaf ears. Not until some decades passed could there be a broader appreciation of his struggles and a better understanding of the solutions he proposed. But Kleist, of course, never lived to experience such understanding.

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